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HEARTS AND THE CROSS



THEY WENT OUT OF THE HUT HAND IN HAND. — *Page 413.*

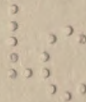
HEARTS AND THE CROSS

BY

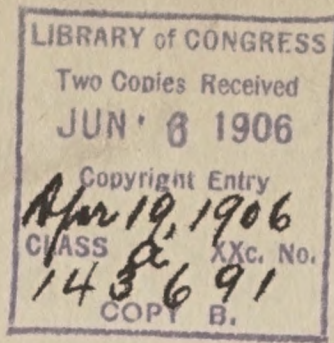
HAROLD MORTON KRAMER

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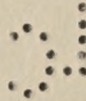


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HEARTS AND THE CROSS.



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Hearts and the Cross

HEARTS AND THE CROSS

CHAPTER I.

A COMPOSITE PARSON.

THE glory of June crept over the hills into the Valley of the Wabash, and that idolized stream shimmered in its radiance. Joseph Wilson, at work in a field of corn, felt the benign influence of the season and sat down in the shade of a walnut-tree growing at the edge of the field. Twenty-three is an age peculiarly susceptible to the wooing of June, and, although it required five feet and nine inches of tape to measure his height, and 170 pounds of metal to balance him on the scales, Joseph was no exception to the rule.

A soft haze, almost imperceptible, hung over the earth, and rays of heat danced in the sunshine, as if rejoicing at their return from their winter's exile; high up in the limitless blue a chicken-hawk slowly circled in an aerial reconnaissance of the poultry-yards spread out below; a chipmunk prowled along the rail fence, and then scampered away as the man reached for a clod. The sound of a whistle attracted his attention, and he saw a long freight-

train creep out from behind a mask of hills half a mile away and go swaying and groaning on its way. The secret of its heavy puffing and slow progress was as an open book to the man under the tree. He knew that the train had stopped for water at the tank on Willow Creek, a short distance back, and, in a few minutes, would be due in Craigville, the metropolis of half a dozen stores that dozed in the heart of this Hoosier Utopia. Then on to Riverside, ten miles away, a hustling city of twenty thousand souls, the road wound among the picturesque hills that framed this fair valley.

Once more the echoing whistle floated to him, and he pictured to himself the stir at the depot, as the Craigville loafers lined up at the station to whittle and to watch the freight unloaded.

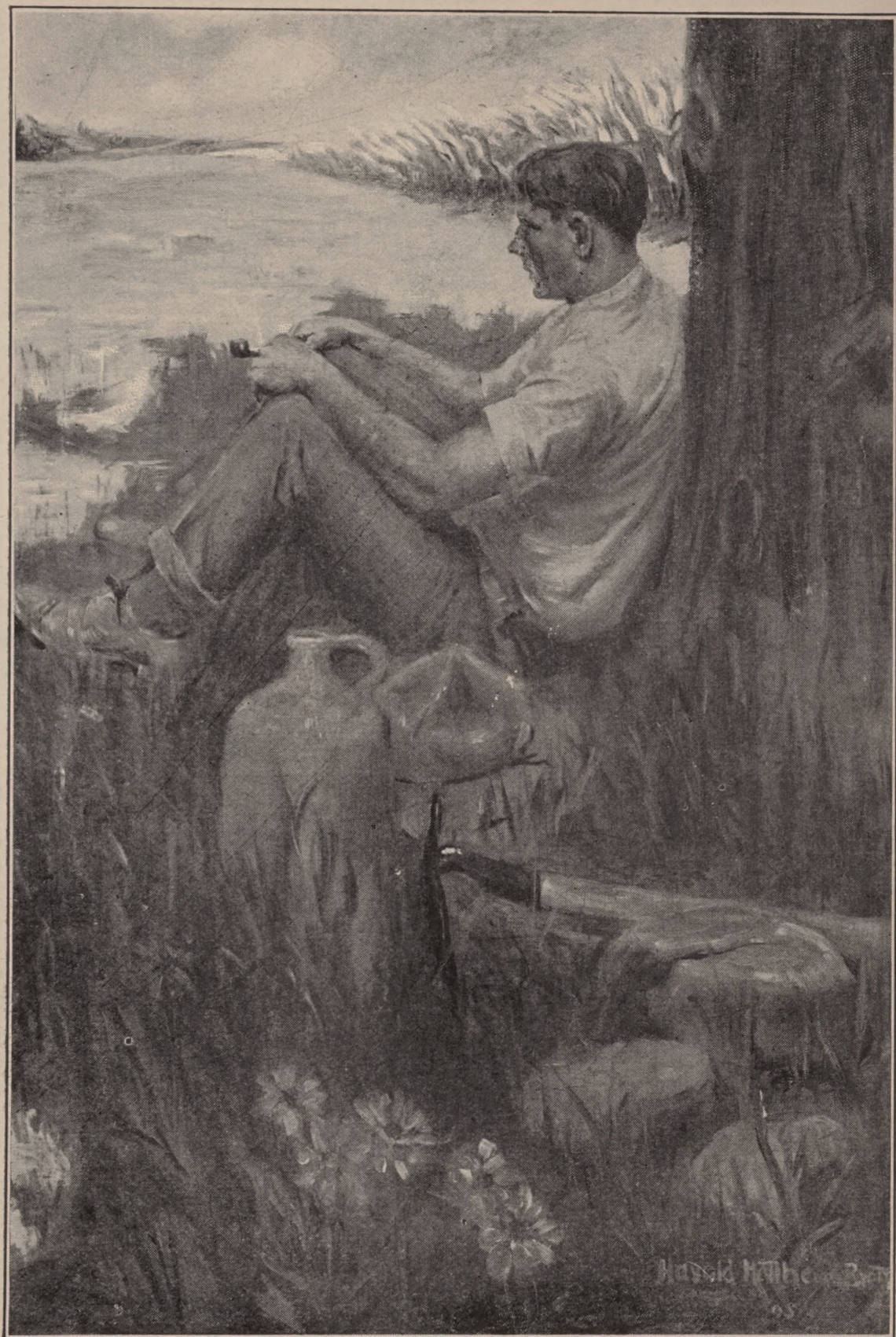
A shadow suddenly sprawled beside him, and he made a movement as if to turn, but settled back with an eager light shining in his eyes as a rich, strong baritone voice directly behind him rose in a short, swinging refrain:

“The storms of life may fiercely blow,
And sorrow in surging tides may flow,
Whatever may come, come joy, come woe,
Still here, here, here, thy refuge forever, forever is here!”

Wilson sat with his back to the tree, staring straight ahead. A moment's silence followed. Then he spoke.

“Sing the rest of it,” he said, dreamily.

“Impossible, that's the end,” was the laughing reply from the unseen singer.



WILSON SAT WITH HIS BACK TO THE TREE, STARING STRAIGHT
AHEAD. — *Page 12.*

"Then commence over and sing it all."

"I'll have to figure out another excuse, and, if you don't look around here, I'll be able to prove an alibi."

The man under the tree skewed himself around until he was able to see the other, but he did not arise. Apparently he did not think of it. He sat staring at a stranger leaning easily on the rail fence.

The stranger was probably a little past thirty, with a face full and round, yet appearing slightly pinched at the mouth corners; of medium height, or a trifle above, strongly built frame, smooth shaven lip and chin that carried two days' growth of beard; hair that was dark and close cropped and that showed a faint gleam of silver at the temples. He was garbed in a dark suit and a light straw hat, both clothing and hat showing evidences of having seen better days. These things Wilson noted as his gaze rested on the stranger.

"Then it wasn't a dream, after all," he said, passing his hand over his eyes.

"If you have reference to me, you are wrong. I *am* a dream, a regular nightmare."

"But it has been so long since I heard that song that I thought perhaps I might be asleep."

The stranger climbed up on the fence and seated himself comfortably, and then gazed rather curiously at the other.

"Pardon me, but is Dudley Buck a favorite in this neighborhood?"

Wilson laughed in a mirthless way. "Hardly," he said. "But I have heard his compositions — well, never mind where; in another world, sung by an angel, I think. But you'd better shift yourself, as that rail is sort of rotten. Rail fences are scarce in this community now, — that one has been there for years, — and I wouldn't want an old friend like it to give a new friend a tumble."

"Thanks. I have no wish to trust my present on the worm-eaten past, so I'll move." He slid along to a more secure rail.

"Now that I'm sure that I am awake, I can't help being curious in regard to your presence here. Where did you drop from, anyway?"

A slight shadow rested for a moment on the countenance of the stranger, but naught but gaiety was reflected in his answer.

"Drop from? A chariot of hope gilded with sunbeams and drawn by good resolutions."

Wilson stared. "Guess you're a poet in disguise," he said.

"I may be disguised, unintentionally. But a poet? Not guilty."

"Then what *are* you?"

The straw hat came off and was used as a fan, while the heel of a rather shabby-looking shoe beat a rat-a-tat on an inoffensive rail.

"'Are' is in the present tense. If you had asked, 'What have you been?' I would have replied, 'A failure — or worse;' if you had asked, 'What will you be?' I should say, 'A success — I hope;' but

you ask, 'What *are* you?' and I confess, 'A tramp — with regret.' "

The speech ended almost with a quaver. Then, with a sudden return to jauntiness, he sprang lightly to the ground, struck a tragic attitude, and declaimed:

"Where the bee sucks, there suck I;
In a cowslip's bell I lie;
There I couch when owls do cry.
On the bat's back I do fly
After summer merrily.
Merrily, merrily, shall I live now
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough."

"Well, you're a queer one, and no mistake," said Wilson, laughing.

"Right! I *am* queer, — a puzzle to myself at times. But, my young friend, you should know that oftentimes a man chooses to play the fool to keep from playing the baby."

"I don't think I understand you."

"I mean that half an hour ago I was on the verge of tears, the result of being deposed from the chariot I told you of."

"Please go on. I am lost in the fog."

The stranger stood meditating a moment. "I don't know why I should choose you as my confessor, but I will," he said. "To be brief, I was comfortably ensconced in a box car in the train that just passed here, but, when the water-tank was reached, I was 'fired.' That's all — but it's enough."

"And you're not a poet?"

"No, a — a —" He hesitated, and then jerked out, "A preacher."

Wilson sprang to his feet, with an exclamation of surprise and incredulity.

"A *preacher*? And stealing a ride?"

"Sounds bad, I know, but I'll send a check to the Company some day and square it."

"Not a Dunkard, are you?"

"No, a — well, we'll say a composite."

"The fog once more."

"Well, it's this way: I was born a Methodist, reared a Baptist, graduated a Presbyterian, and occupied an Episcopal pulpit."

Wilson roared with laughter. "Good gracious! I should think you'd wake up at night fighting with yourself."

"I don't, though. You see, as a composite, I am at home in any community. But say, a happy thought! Doesn't this particular section of Tyler County need a parson?"

Wilson plucked a blade of grass and chewed it reflectively a moment before making reply.

"I think we do. But how do you know this is Tyler County?"

"Met a man over in the woods yonder, and he asked my politics and what part of Tyler County I voted in. Wanted me to sit down on a stump and argue the money question with him."

"Small-like man, hatchet-faced, red-headed?"

"Correct."

“Jap Munson. He’s a queer codger; used to be a Republican, but he got tangled up on free silver, and now he swears that the gold standard is the root of all evil. Seems to feel that the crops would yield a little better if it wasn’t for the ‘cross of gold.’ He’s a square man, for all that. But are you in earnest about wishing to locate here?”

“To tell the truth, I don’t know. It was just a fleeting idea. I don’t know why not, though.”

“Well, there’s a frame church close by that lacks a parson. You might take that. But — the salary will be shy. You see, they are nearly all Dunkards hereabouts, and there’s only a small colony of the others, and they’re all denominations. That’s the reason the church is empty. The creeds wrangle.”

“That’s the sort of place the Rev. Robert Wayne — myself” (with a bow) — “is seeking. The salary? Poof!” He waved his hand. “If I can find work in the fields, I will be content. I want no money for preaching God’s word, and I rather think a composite is the crying need of that church.”

In the leaves overhead a couple of blue jays quarreled for a moment and then flew away, scolding noisily. The lowing of cattle and the plaintive bleat of lambs came from the pastures, as the two men sat under the tree talking. Wayne entertained the young farmer with stories of college life and of the Southland, where he was born and had spent his youth. As he talked, the corn-field, the rail fence, the tree of walnut, faded, and he saw a boy on a Southern plantation, petted and with wealth lav-

ished upon him until his untrained feet faltered at the parting of the ways. Broad acres of cotton gleamed white under the hot caress of Florida's sun; the waters of the Suwanee danced in the moonlight as they slipped by. He heard the crooning song of the darkies as they strummed rude banjos and voiced quaint melodies; he saw —

“Afternoon's 'most gone; we might as well start for the house.”

He stared blankly at Wilson. Then the field of waving corn came into his life once more, and he remembered. He arose and brushed his clothes with his handkerchief.

“I am ready,” he said, “but, as an applicant for a pulpit, I fear I lack tone, such as a tailor, a barber, and a haberdasher might impart.”

His companion regarded him critically. “I can't say that you do *look* the part, exactly, and — perhaps — it would be a good idea for you to present yourself as an applicant for farm work, and attend to the preaching business later.”

Wayne slapped him on the shoulder. “Joe, — my familiarity is born of gratitude, — you should be a politician; as a diplomat, you are a success. You've solved the problem, and I see my way clear to handle the elder Wilson, your respected father.”

They had jumped the fence and were walking slowly through the woods, taking a short cut to the house. The scent of spicewood and the fragrance of the wild rose were in the air, while blue bells, violets, and sweet-williams rioted beneath their feet.

“I know enough about politics to get my ballot into the box without help from the election board, — and that’s about all. I remember of hearing a fellow make a speech, once, in which he declared that the man who wasn’t thoroughly posted on the political questions of the day was not a loyal citizen. I went home impressed and determined. For two days I buried myself in tariff bills and the details of the ‘Crime of ’73,’ but, somehow, it would slip away from me, and I would suddenly arouse to find that I had forgotten the subject about which I had been reading, and was dreaming, — that’s the word, — dreaming —”

“Of Dudley Buck and the poets.”

“At any rate, I threw the tariff into the fire, and declared the ’73 Crime outlawed. But — let’s go this way and cross the creek on the foot-log, — I’m ashamed of myself. Seems like I can’t get down to earth. There’s the creek right ahead of —”

“Hi, there! Shy off to the left!”

The shout came from directly ahead, and from behind a tree-trunk they could see an arm waving, while above the arm a head bobbed around excitedly, a pair of eye-glasses catching the sun’s rays and producing a curious glare. From the branches of a near-by tree the major portion of a man’s wearing apparel flapped in the breeze, as if celebrating its emancipation from legs and arms.

“That’s ‘Paragraph’s’ voice,” replied Wilson, “but the reflection of that glass front conceals the features.”

"Oh, it's me, all right," said the man behind the tree. "But don't you come any nearer, or it will be one of your saddest hours."

"Well, what on earth are you doing in that plight? Practising a ghost dance?"

"This is not a moment for levity, Joseph, *mon ami*, — notice that I'm improving in that foreign jargon, — this is a time for commiseration and — and — forbearance."

"Very well, then; tell us your troubles."

"Well, you see, we got the *Sun* off the press early to-day, and I decided to pay my respects to Susanna. So I caught that pokey old accommodation, and in the course of time reached Craigville. Thought I might find some good Samaritan there who was hitched up and coming toward the Wilson place, but there wasn't, so I decided to do the 'heel and toe' across the woods and fields. Do you follow me?"

He was assured that they did, and continued:

"I came drilling along through the woods here, and all at once I spied an animal curled up in a hollow log. 'A 'coon,' thought I. So I got a pole and slipped up, and slip-p-e-d up and fetched him a bump. He began to scramble, and I fetched him another bump, and then — whe-e-w! It was a skunk. You needn't laugh; I had to get out of my clothes, — couldn't live in 'em, — so I hung them up to air. Just step a little to the left and keep to the windward of me."

Wilson and Wayne shouted with laughter.

"You'd better use a telephone to-night in your courting," said Wilson, as they circled around the forlorn creature behind the tree.

"Tell Susanna I'll be there, — but don't tell her the 'coon story."

As they crossed on the foot-log, the sun sank lower and the shadows lay heavy on Willow Creek, and something in the rippling murmur of the waters brought back the picture of the Suwanee to the stranger, and the dreams of his youth seemed to lie beneath his feet, the joyous trills sombred with shadows. Shaking his broad shoulders as if to free himself from the tentacles of the past, he smiled at his companion's biography of the unfortunate whom he had addressed as "Paragraph." This was a nickname, he explained, bestowed because of his occupation, that of a reporter on a weekly newspaper in Riverside.

"His real name's William Miller, 'Bill' for short, but oftener 'Paragraph.' Been courting Susanna Prescott, who is maid-of-all-work at our house, for, oh, years. Pretty good sort of chap, but you've got to let him rattle. He enjoys it."

They turned into the lane and the farmhouse lay before them, a large, roomy, substantial-looking structure, surrounded by giant oaks, from a limb of one a rope-swing dangling, between two others a hammock swaying, empty, in the breeze. A dog came bounding to meet them, and capered with joy over its master's return. In the barn was heard

the merry whistle of the hired hands; from the cow lot came the sound of a feminine voice, singing:

“Pretty little Mary, she’s the keeper of a dairy
And I’ll meet her when the sun goes down.”

“Susanna’s preparing to milk,” said Joe, “and, if I know the symptoms, she’s expecting Paragraph. She’d better put a muzzle on her nose.”

“Her cheeks are red as the red, red rose,
Her hair is a beautiful brown;
She’s the darling of my heart, she is,
And I’ll meet her when the —”

The conclusion was not heard, for at that moment a man came out of the house, and stood looking at them. A fine-looking man he had once been, and even yet he bore himself with an unconscious dignity. Once tall, his broad shoulders now stooped, and the hair, still abundant, swept back in snowy waves from a seamed brow.

“My father,” whispered Joe, as they approached. “He’s nearly seventy, but I’ll bet that this is the first time he ever met a composite parson.”

CHAPTER II.

A FACE IN THE MOONLIGHT

AFTER supper they sat on the broad porch in the twilight, watching the bats blindly darting about the gables of the house. Susanna in the kitchen washed the dishes, occasionally breaking into tuneful declarations that there was to be a meeting when the sun went down.

Wayne said to himself that never had he so enjoyed a meal, and then flushed as he thought that this might partly be accounted for by the fact that he had fasted for twenty-four hours. Impulsive, warm-hearted Joe had welcomed him as a friend as they had chatted under the walnut-tree, and the old man had received him kindly, the more so, perhaps, because farm-hands were scarce that season, and the sturdy frame of the stranger was the best kind of recommendation. The quiet, sweet-faced lady, whom Joe had introduced as "Mother," was equally gracious. The old people saw no cause to cross-examine; a stranger sought work; they needed a farm-hand; it was sufficient.

As they sat on the porch, the old man puffed contentedly at his pipe and discussed with Wayne

the prospects for building up the scattered congregation that once worshiped in the little frame church.

"It'll seem pretty good to attend something besides a Dunkard meeting once more. Not that there's anything wrong with the Dunkards, Parson, but they're just a mite wearing on me. No better people living than they; they're unwavering in their faith. The Christians that met death in Nero's arena were not more firm in trusting God, but I'm an old man, and I was taught things some different, and I suppose it is natural for me to long for the religion of my mother."

"Natural? Mr. Wilson, it would be sacrilegious to view the subject otherwise."

"You have strong feelings on the question, I see."

"A feeling as strong as life. When I go to sleep at night I can see my mother by my side. I was but a boy when she left me, but her admonishments have shaped my destiny. I have strayed from the course she pointed me to, but never have I forgotten. The mistakes were of the head, not of the heart, and I know that to-night she forgives my errors and points me to the future. Men may preach of charity as the greatest of virtues, and I grant that it is a grace to be taught as Christ is taught, but unless it embodies the elements of forgiveness it falls short."

The old lady, who had been a silent listener, arose, and, murmuring something, went into the house.

Joe glanced furtively at his father, and then abruptly stated that he hoped it would rain, as the corn was getting a little dry.

"I think that you argue from theory rather than from experience," said the old man, at last, after a silence that had grown awkward, his voice betraying a quality of harshness.

Wayne had surmised by Mrs. Wilson's action and by Joe's sudden interest in the weather that he had unconsciously touched on forbidden ground in his discussion. However, he saw no way of graceful retreat; the old man's reply had been a challenge.

"I argue from the fact that I have stood in need of forgiveness, and have been given charity instead."

"But what can be grander than charity? What nobler work for God can one do than to feed the hungry and clothe the naked?"

"There is but one grander work, and that is to forgive. We may live in the midst of abundance, and give lavishly to the unfortunate, and yet fall short of heaven, for, without a forgiving spirit, it is as though we lived in the temporal world without hope of the spiritual. I believe in a practical religion myself; I believe in relieving the sick and distressed, in filling the flour-bin and wood-box of the needy, and then pointing them to the Man of Galilee, but that is all so easy. Out of plenty it is a simple matter to give, but when our inward lives, our pride, our hopes, have been stricken, it

is not so easy to forgive, and therefore the quality is the more precious."

"Forgiveness belongs to the Lord. Shall I, when a man comes to my door hungry, say to him, 'My poor fellow, you ask for bread, but I shall bestow upon you that which is greater than charity; I forgive you for idling when work was at hand; I forgive you for sinning against society by debauching yourself with liquor; go now and be comforted?' Shall I say that, or shall I say, 'I know you are an idler, a drone, even a drunkard, but here is food; look to God for forgiveness?'"

"Pardon me, but you persist in misunderstanding me. In the case you picture, charity is, of course, the needful thing, but, as I pleaded before, it is so easy of accomplishment that it sinks into insignificance as compared to the quality I advocate. Forgiveness is for individuals, charity for generality. A man may be starving, but, if you refuse him food, there are hundreds of thousands of others to whom he may turn for succor, and a generous people have provided organizations and institutions to which the hungry may turn as a last resort, but the man who appeals to you for forgiveness for some wrong committed against you has not elsewhere to plead. You may feed him, but his soul starves still. It is the warm hand-clasp he seeks, and, though there may be other hand-clasps, they are not the one sought by the penitent; there may be others who will say, 'My poor fellow, you have my sympathy; though you have erred, count it as

dead, and look to the future with its possibilities,' but it is not the voice he longs to hear. He has offended an individual, and, ere peace comes to his heart, that individual must say, in substance: 'Dry your tears and let the shadow be removed from your heart, for I forgive you all that is past, and count it as naught; if you have sinned against heaven look to God, and may He forgive you also.' Then, and not until then, will joy come into that life. The seeker may have made peace with heaven, but even that is not sufficient for the one who begs for mercy on earth."

"You may be right, Parson, but one must not look for man to be as perfect as the Christ. It is an ideal to be desired, I grant, but the millennium is not yet come."

"But it is coming. From ignorance and superstition the world is advancing into the light, and Christianity is the torch that leads. In all the ages, among all peoples, an innate belief in a supreme being of some kind has existed and has uplifted. As the world advanced these inborn beliefs took various forms, and at last science was aroused, and learned skeptics turned upon religion and struck at it, but witness the result: Each blow of science has but chipped away the quartz, leaving the gold shining brighter and brighter; the seething fires of atheism have not been in vain, for they have served to melt away the dross and expose the treasure it had encumbered. As time passes, the world turns more and more to that Book which

is like unto the Rock of Ages. So I declare my belief in the ultimate coming of the millennium, and if I should be asked to name, in my opinion, the greatest passage in the Book, the one that will have the greatest influence toward that ideal condition, I should quote from Mark, 'And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any, that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.' "

"Well, well, I am willing to declare a truce, but I will not admit that I am convinced. Old men like me are generally hard to chase out of a ditch in which their opinions may be intrenched. Joe, I saw a couple of strange men nosing around along the creek this afternoon. They acted as if they had lost something, and would stoop down occasionally. I started down to speak to them, but they walked back into the woods, as if they didn't care to be interviewed. See anything of them?"

"Not a glimpse. Strangest man I saw in the woods was Paragraph."

The old man chuckled at the remembrance of Joe's vivid account of the young reporter's experience.

"Probably William will devote more time to the study of natural history in the future. Had he studied more of that and less French and other nonsense, he would have known the difference between a 'coon and a skunk."

"Yes, father, but experience has always been lauded as such a splendid teacher."

"It ought to be in this case, anyway. How's the corn over in that south field?"

"Coming along finely; some weeds in it, but I dug the most of them out. By the way, you had better have Susanna count the chickens to-morrow. I noticed a hawk skirmishing around this way. I watched it some little time —"

"No doubt," observed the old man, dryly.

"But I couldn't just figure out where it had decided to attack," continued the young man, ignoring his father's implication. "Wayne — I mean Rev. Wayne — came along on his way out from Craigville about that time, and I forgot the hawk."

"I reckon a chicken or two won't matter much, anyway," responded the elder Wilson, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, "but I think hawks should be —"

"Oh, the moonlight's fair to-night along the Wabash,
From the fields there comes the scent of new-mown hay."

"There's Paragraph," said Joe, as the cheery voice was heard at the side gate. "By his song ye may know him. If he should arrive without that song I would send for a doctor."

"Ah, a merry evening, good sirs," was the blithe greeting of the singer, as he came up the path. "Some chap, a poet I think he was, once asked the question, 'What is so rare as a day in June?' I'd like to know who he was, for I have the answer. It is a night in June."

He came up, shook hands all around, and bowed like a cavalier when presented to Wayne.

"A preacher and a worker, — happy combination that. Too often do we find that the preacher wants some other fellow to do the working, while he preaches against the love of money. Then he is urgently 'called to other fields where he can do more extensive work for the Lord,' as he informs his congregation in a tombstone voice, but should some prying, inquisitive member of his flock make intelligent inquiry, he will discover that the 'broader field' has an increased salary attachment. Joe, I'll assassinate you if you don't quit whistling 'Coony up a Gum Stump.' Parson, that young man needs your hardest licks, — spiritually, of course. He's mocking my past misery."

"Oh, the Parson will look after me all right; but you had better look after the fair Susanna."

"That I will. Where is she? But never mind. 'Her eyes are bright, they shine at night,' and that mysterious something we call affinity shall lead me to her."

"Well, for fear affinity loses you in the dark, I'll direct you to the back porch. I heard her out there awhile ago, singing something about red cheeks, brown hair, and sundown."

"What's the news in Riverside, William?" asked Mr. Wilson.

"Nothing special; a wedding occasionally; ditto a funeral. The principal topic of conversation is electric railway. They say one is headed that way, and will connect us with Indianapolis. That's all

I know. Oh, yes, Riverside has bought a new fire-engine. Expecting it any day now."

"That's it, that's it!" exclaimed Joe.

"What's it, and what's what?" asked Miller.

"Why, that's what I saw on a flat car to-day, shining and glittering."

"Seems to me, young man," said his father, "that between the hawks and the freight-trains you didn't have much time left for hoeing weeds."

The reporter was half-way around the house, but came back. "Say, Joe," he asked, hesitatingly, "you — don't — that is — I mean — can you — ah, er — detect any — er — odor about my raiment?"

"Come to think of it, I do. You smell like a Thanksgiving cake."

"That's all right, just so that — that other isn't noticeable."

"No, but what is it that is noticeable?"

"Vanilla extract."

"What?"

"Yes, I put on my clothes and hustled back to Craigville. After I got away from the locality, I found that it was the locality more than my clothes that was affected. I intended creeping back home, but that 'plug' train was way late, so I decided to perfume up a little and return to my conquest. Wasn't a thing in Craigville in the way of perfume, except asafetida and vanilla extract. Of the two evils I chose the lesser. A little of the extract rubbed in my hair and on the inside of my vest fixed me all right."

The light-hearted reporter went in search of Susanna, and the preacher sat talking with the farmer and his son regarding plans for the work of the church and the work of the farm. The full moon peeped over the edge of the strip of woods skirting the creek, and from a neighboring farmhouse a watch-dog challenged the appearance of the queen of night. From down in the shadows came the soft note of a dove, that ventriloquist of the woods. Within the house Mrs. Wilson sat knitting, the lamplight giving her face, as seen through the open window by Wayne, a chastened look of long-borne sadness. As he watched her, a feeling of utter loneliness came to him and a flood of longing swept into his heart, a longing for the mother who had faded from his life while Youth nestled at his feet, leaving him to face the world alone. If she had lived, he wondered if she would not to-night be sitting in the lamplight knitting, while he sat close by in silent adoration. Then something very like a sob escaped him, for the knitting-needles rested idly in the lap of the old lady and, gently rocking, she was singing, in a voice glorified with a quaver of age, an old hymn:

“Leave, oh, leave me not alone;
Still support and comfort me.”

It was the favorite of his sainted mother. A clock somewhere within the house struck the hour of nine, and Wilson arose.

“Time for workers to go to bed,” he said, lead-

ing the way into the house, and the others silently followed.

“Mr. Wayne, you will sleep down-stairs to-night. William will share Joe’s bed.”

Try as he would, Wayne found sleep elusive. The kaleidoscopic events of the last twenty-four hours drove slumber from his pillow. The clock struck ten, and he heard Paragraph deliver a flowery good-night oration to Susanna, and then heard his step on the stairs as he ascended to his bed. Again the house was still, but wakefulness lingered.

Arising, he stood at the window, gazing out at the peaceful scene. The night was warm, and the window had been left raised to its full height. A sudden impulse came to him. He hesitated; then, slipping his clothes on, stepped softly through the window, and stood in the shadow of the house. The mastiff arose, and regarded him with silent suspicion; then, seeming to realize that all was well, it wagged its tail and again stretched out on the porch.

The moon had risen almost to the zenith, and was flooding the earth with mellow glory. A balmy breeze stirred a lilac bush and bore to the man a deep breath of sweetest perfume. The woodlands near by seemed beckoning, and almost before he realized it he had turned his steps in that direction. It was all so grand, so free! He took off his hat, and waved his arms in abandon, and drank in the scented draughts, born of unfettered nature. A wild impulse was upon him to walk on and on,

leaving behind him forever the farmhouse where in a whimsical hour he had decided to take refuge. The world had changed. The days of chivalry were here again, and he was a knight going forth to storm and destroy the castle of Reality. Picking up a stone, he hurled it at the man in the moon, with a laughing challenge to combat. He paused. The creek lay before him. Sitting down on a log, he expanded his chest, and then a vigorous young sprout growing close by caught his eye. Stepping quickly forward, he seized it, and tore it up by the roots, exulting in his strength. Swinging it around his head, he was about to hurl it from him, when he suddenly paused, staring in amazement.

Fifty feet away the foot-log lay across Willow Creek, and on this log, leaning on the rude hand-rail, stood a woman. Her back was toward him and, although she stood in the shadow, he could see that she was gazing dreamily down into the water. The grass had deadened his footsteps, and it was plain that she had not heard him. As he stood irresolute the figure on the foot-log straightened, and a moment later she stepped off on to the bank, the moonlight falling full on the slight figure, the fair, fresh face and well-moulded head, crowned with a wealth of golden hair.

“Great God!”

The cry was a half-smothered, guttural gasp, as Wayne reeled and sank down on the log.

Like a nymph of the moonlight, she stood for a moment, her clinging white garments giving her

a wraith-like appearance. Then she walked slowly forward, her rose-garlanded hat clasped in her hands, her every appearance indicating deep study. Her course was directly toward the man cowering on the log, and, with pale face, he arose unsteadily to his feet. He feared to retreat lest he should stumble in his sudden weakness, and betray his presence. There was but one course to pursue. Slipping over the log, he stretched himself at full length close against it and in its shadow.

There he lay, with wildly beating heart, while the vision advanced slowly toward the place of his concealment. Then, she seemed to change her mind, and altered her course so as to keep more in the open. Thus she passed within a few feet of the log, utterly unconscious that behind it groveled a wretched creature whose veins were standing out like sinews on his pallid brow, a man who, with knightly visions, had gloried in his strength, but who now, in his weakness, was ready to crawl in the dust at her feet.

Keeping well in the shadows, he began creeping after her, determined, now that danger of discovery was past, to follow her to her place of abode. The queer pursuit had continued but a short distance when a surprising interruption occurred. Voices were heard, and the next instant two men came striding across a little clearing, their course being such that it would take them directly between Wayne and the woman. She was quick to take alarm, and darted away like a flitting shadow,

rendering it impossible for him to follow her without being detected by the men, and probably by the woman herself, and this he dared not do. So he shrank back in the shadow of a giant oak, as the men passed.

"Who was that?" exclaimed one, as he caught sight of the disappearing woman.

"Oh, some country girl who is probably going to a tryst."

"But there might be the devil to pay if she has been spying on us."

"Nonsense. Female detectives belong in story books, not in Tyler County. Some of these Dunkards are so devilish pious that the only way their daughters can have a lover away from the noses of the old folks is to steal out at night. Come on."

The men were close enough to enable the hiding preacher to hear their words, but the rough slouch hats drawn over their faces concealed their features. One carried a pick on his shoulder, while the other carried a spade. They passed on, and as it was evident that the woman had escaped by this time, Wayne determined to follow the men.

Luckily, their way led through the woods, and he was enabled to keep them in sight with ease. At length they stopped, and he could see them moving about in a mysterious manner. In a few moments he understood. He heard the sound of a wheel scraping on a buggy side, and then saw one of the men backing the vehicle out of a clump of bushes where the horse had been tied. The broad,

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graveled highway lay just beyond, and the watcher knew that the chase was ended. And so it proved, for, opening a gate, the men drove out to the road and then turned southward, driving at a brisk pace.

CHAPTER III.

JAP MUNSON, POLITICIAN

THE old-fashioned clock in the sitting-room (as it is called in Indiana) was recording the hour of midnight when he threw himself on the bed once more. At last he fell into an uneasy slumber, broken by distorted dreams. He was being borne along through space by unseen hands, while a strange, rushing sound filled his ears. A voice that seemed to be all about him, yet invisible in force, told him in a kind of chant that it was the scroll of time being turned backward. Presently, they came to a land that was fair and beauteous. Magnolia and cypress trees stood like sentinels on the picket lines of paradise. A river flowed peacefully onward through this valley framed by the hills, and a strain of music from somewhere told him that it was the Suwanee. The flight was stayed, and he looked about to find the landscape familiar. Then he remembered. The scenes were those of his young manhood. He seemed to be alone in a sort of a twilight, but in a moment two men, with faces shaded, appeared, and with pick and spade began to dig at a spot marked by a

great white cross. He tried to move, but an enchantment was upon him. He shouted, but the sound died on his lips. Swiftly the strange men labored, then suddenly paused. An angel with clinging robes of white came slowly forward, an angel with the moonlight bathing her upturned face, with a wealth of golden hair crowning her shapely head, and in her hand a garland of roses for a sceptre.

“What doest thou?”

The voice was not of earth. It was as if the silvery strings of an æolian harp had been swept by the zephyrs of heaven until they breathed music. The diggers dropped upon their knees and made reply:

“Oh, queen, knowest thou that here lies buried a sin of scarlet which we would bring forth and lay upon the shoulders of yon guilty trembler?”

“I bid you forsake your task. See you not the Cross? Know you not that it is written, ‘The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin?’”

A mist arose, and when it had passed the toilers had gone. The power of movement came back, and the dazed mortal stretched out his arms in mute supplication to the vision in white, but she pointed to the Cross, and, with a wave of the rose sceptre, vanished. But the Cross glowed brighter than before, and with a sob he cast himself at its foot and about it entwined his arms.

A strange brightness seemed to be around and about him and — he awoke to find the morning sun-

light streaming in at his window. Dazed he lay there, watching the window blind gently swaying in rhythm to the morning breeze. He closed his eyes and wondered if this was Fairyland. The lowing of cattle came to him, the crow of a rooster, the cheery whistle of a farm-hand, and then from the cow lot there came floating fragments of a song: "Her cheeks . . . red rose . . . sun goes down." Memory was once more on its throne.

A tap on the door added to the reality and, in response to his reply, the voice of Joe informed him that it was half-past six. Springing from bed he dressed in haste, well knowing that the hour was late for a farm-hand to be abed. He had scarcely finished when Joe came in with a bucket of water.

"Going to make company out of you this morning and bring you in some water. Pitcher's broke, but that bowl yonder will hold enough to wash your face with, I guess."

"You are certainly the personification of kindness, but I don't want to be 'company.' Let me fare the same as the other hands."

"That's all right. To-morrow you'll wash at the pump-trough with the rest of us. Guess a wash-bowl one morning won't make a dude of you."

A chuckling laugh was the response from the man at the wash-bowl, as he bathed his face in the clear, cool water fresh from the well.

"Father thought that you looked rather tired, so he gave you an extra hour on the sheets this

morning, too. Now don't say a word," hastily, as the other attempted to remonstrate. "It's a kind of an off day, anyway. Don't know what the programme is. Let's go out to breakfast and we'll find out."

In the sitting-room they found Mr. Wilson and Paragraph deep in the discussion of the electric line projects the reporter had referred to the night before. The greeting of the former was kindly and dignified, while the other's was most effusive, and filled with glowing panegyrics on the glory of the morning, a greeting that was filled with twittering birds, flowery chalices of dewy nectar, and mellow sunbeams.

"Good gracious, let me get to the door," exclaimed Joe. "I didn't know things looked like that out-of-doors. If I had an imagination like Paragraph's, I would camp in a rose-bush and turn up my nose at a house."

Mrs. Wilson came in, and the fragrance of frying ham came with her. She shook hands with Wayne, and hoped he had rested well. He hesitated; then, with a guilty feeling of being forced to a falsehood, replied that his rest had been perfect.

"And I wish to return my thanks for the gracious hour allotted me this morning," he added.

A light footfall sounded behind him. He turned, and stood facing the nymph of the moonlight, the angel of his dream. He stood like a statue, staring into her eyes, and then came to his senses in time to hear Joe saying:

"My sister, Lorraine, Reverend Wayne."

He bowed, and murmured an acknowledgment.

"But, I must ask, Miss Wilson, that you omit the 'Reverend,' and know me by the good American 'Mister,' if a title is used."

"Told you he was an odd one," broke in Paragraph, triumph in his tones.

"William, you will have Rev — Mr. Wayne believing us rude enough to talk about him," was the laughing reply of the girl, and Wayne jerkily insisted that if such were the case he would consider it an honor, not rudeness.

"Well, I'm the only one that's done the talking, Parson," said the reporter. "I told her that this roof was sheltering a *rara avis* (that's Latin, and I can show you in the book that it's correct), yes, a *rara avis*, in the form of a preacher who wanted to work. And now you cast aside the 'Reverend,' the holy crown of a theological college, and insist on being plain 'Mister.' I insist that you are odd, but you are the kind of a man that will honor the Wabash." His arm described a half-circle toward the distant timber line that marked the course of that idolized stream.

Mrs. Wilson had ushered them into the dining-room, and was busying herself in a motherly way, pressing the viands upon them. "This honey will be nice with your hot biscuit, Mr. Wayne," she urged.

"That honey is the genuine article, too," said the farmer. "William, there, can testify to that."

He helped us gather it and a big bee popped him right between the eyes while he was doing it."

"Yes, Paragraph has had some thrilling adventures in this neighborhood," remarked Joe, with a grin, while the discomfited reporter glared savagely at him, and gulped his coffee steaming hot.

"All lovers who go a-wooing should be willing to meet with adventures, and surely no knight of mediæval days was more gallant than is Mr. Miller." The defence came from the daughter, but Paragraph looked as though he preferred to change the subject.

"Paragraph is gallant enough, Lorraine," responded Joe, "but there are some encounters in which neither gift of tongue nor ability with the pen can be of assistance to him."

The subject of this good-natured badinage appeared so utterly miserable that the kindly old farmer went to his rescue by switching the conversation into a new channel.

"Mr. Wayne, I forgot to explain the presence of Lorraine here this morning." He paused a moment to pour his coffee out into the saucer to cool, and Wayne felt like thanking him for bringing up the subject. That was the very information he desired.

"She's been teaching a short term of summer school down on Willow Creek, and her school closed yesterday. She sat up with a sick friend the early part of the night, and then came on home. Yes,

sir, walked through the woods by herself. That's the kind of girls Indiana has."

"It really was very foolish and unwise of me, but the night was so bright and fine that I enjoyed the walk alone."

"And did you see — that is, I mean did nothing occur to frighten you?" Wayne felt that he was on dangerous ground, but he could not help voicing the question.

She flashed him a sudden look, half of doubt, half of suspicion, but her face cleared in a moment.

"Well, I acknowledge that I was a little nervous when I reached home. But it was really nothing that —"

"Hello!" a voice hailed from the yard.

"Jap Munson," remarked Joe, as a step sounded on the porch, and the next moment the caller stepped to the open door of the dining-room.

"Rather late breakfast, hey?" he queried, bobbing his red head to first one and then the other in salutation. "Glad to see you home, Lorry," he added to the girl.

Refusing an invitation to take a seat at the table, he declared that he was "in a rush." Nevertheless, he sat down at one side, twirled a broad-rimmed straw hat in his left hand, while with the other he dexterously flourished a blacksnake whip and flicked it at a fly on the floor near Wayne, thereby causing the preacher to dodge involuntarily.

"Keep your seat, stranger. I just wanted to boost that pesky fly. No danger of Jap Munson

harming a hair of your head with a blacksnake. No, sir. I can pick a skeeter off the ear of a horse and never touch the hide. There's an art in handling a blacksnake, *I tell you*. Went over to Riverside once and saw 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' played. I stood the death of Little Eva without batting an eye, but when Simon Legree tackled Uncle Tom with that blacksnake whip, it brought tears to my eyes."

"It is a very affecting scene, Mr. Munson," said the preacher.

"Affecting! I should say so. The tarnation idiot didn't know how to handle a blacksnake any more than a Digger Indian knows how to handle a cake of soap. Yes, sir, such ignorance brought tears to my eyes. After the show, I went to the chap and offered to teach him for nothing. And what do you suppose he said? Did he thank me? No, sir. Called me a 'hayseed,' a 'stubble-jumper,' and a lot more names. He didn't go on the stage the next night, though. Doctor said a man with a broken nose and two black eyes ought to keep his room."

"By the way, let me introduce Mr. Wayne to you, Mr. Munson," said Joe, after acknowledging that Simon Legree's punishment had been more than deserved.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Vaine. Guess you're the man I met yesterday over yonder in the woods."

"Yes, I'm the one. But you caught my name wrong. It's Wayne."

"All right; hearing's a little off sometimes, but I can hear a man when he calls me a 'hayseed,' you bet. The farmers are the backbone of this country, and this country's just about the whole thing on this earth. The *idea* of saying that we can't fix our money the way we want it. I say that if this government stamps a silver dollar and calls it a dollar, it *is* a dollar, and if the derved Britishers —"

"How's your wheat coming on, Jap?" The old man was striving desperately to dodge an argument, for he saw the "Crime of '73" about to be held up in all of its hideousness.

"Wheat's all right. But what's the use of raising anything? Answer me; answer *me*! Why, gentlemen, with silver restored to its rights, we'd get something for our crops. In 1873, when —"

"Going to be preaching at the Walnut Grove Church Sunday," interposed Joe. Breakfast was over, and Mrs. Wilson and Lorraine had fled to the kitchen.

"Preaching? Who by, some Dunkard?"

"No, a composite."

"A what?"

"By Mr. Wayne here. He will simply preach the Bible, and you can take your choice of routes to the Golden Somewhere."

"That suits me. I'll choose the longest route; I'm in no hurry to get there."

"Guess you'd better take the Methodist ticket, then. They'll keep you waiting outside on probation for six months."

“Joseph!”

It was his mother's voice raised in mild reproof. She had been reared in the faith, the hymns of Methodism had been her comfort and stay in many hours of sorrow, and it was akin to sacrilege, in her opinion, to hear the tenets of her religion so lightly spoken of.

“I beg your pardon, mother. I meant no disrespect.”

She smiled, and, though she doubtless considered him thoughtless, pride and love beamed in her eyes. Wayne's impulse was to grasp the young man's hand. He knew that the chaff with Munson had been a mere play of words, but the mother was of a generation whose code recognized no persiflage on matters of religion, and the son who honored his mother with an apology for that which had been a cross-current to her convictions was worthy of his parentage.

It was Saturday, and Wilson proclaimed a semi-holiday. Wayne had assured him of his willingness to begin his ministerial work the next day, and the farmer had thereupon declared that Saturday would be given over to preparation for the occasion, and the boy who assisted Susanna in the dairy had been mounted on one of the plough horses soon after breakfast and despatched as a courier to spread the news throughout the community.

The men strolled out to the orchard, Munson protesting that he must be going.

“Can't stay a minute longer. I'm in a rush, if

I ever was. Going down to Bundy's Ford after a load of rocks. Wife says I'm to whitewash 'em and make a big flower bed. Says we've got to have flowers."

"Think you'd know a geranium from a sunflower, Jap?" asked the old man, with a twinkle in his eye.

"That's her business. I'm head over heels in politics, and you bet there ain't many flowers in politics."

"No, but there are plenty of thorns."

"Sure, but you've got to know how to handle 'em. Well, I'm in a rush and must mosey along. Just thought I'd drop in a minute as I went by. If any of you go over to Craigville, I wish you'd inquire for my mail."

"I expect Joe will go over, and get a couple of the horses shod."

"I'll be around this evening after my mail. And here's a dollar; bring me the whole of it in postage stamps. I'm a candidate for township trustee, but I'm in such an awful rush that I come pretty near forgetting to tell you about it. Yes, sir, and I'm going to make a whirlwind campaign, too."

"Getting an early start in the campaign, aren't you, Jap?" asked Joe.

"Sure thing. I read a book once in which a fellow said, 'Thrice armed is he whose quarrel is just, but four arms has he who hits you fust.'"

"Then you want to have the prestige of being first in the field, do you?"

"That's the *idea*. I intend sending personal letters to every voter in the township, and explain it to them. Silver's been degraded, and woe with a big 'W' is coming to this land. Who's the important man in such a time of trial? An — swer *me*! It's the trustee. Yes, sir, it's the trustee that puts shoes on the feet and bread in the mouths. Governors and presidents don't do you any good when them days come, but the trustee, if he's fit, goes among the unfortunate victims of a crime committed in the halls of Congress 'way back in '73, and he puts a joint of beef in the pot and a sack of flour in the bin."

"How are you and Hiram Owens getting along with your line fence quarrel?" The old farmer had again shied at the "crime" and had chosen the one subject to change the current, so he thought.

"Not getting along at all." Munson hesitated, and then popped his whip at a leaf, cutting it as if with a razor. "He wanted me to pay half on putting a wire fence between our farms, but I 'lowed that a rail fence was plenty good enough. Result is, he's put in a wire fence, and I've built a rail fence right by the side of it. No sense of such extravagance as his in the face of what's coming. Wait till I get to be trustee and famine perches on that wire fence and croaks at him. I'll say, 'Hiram Owens, in my official capacity it is my duty to feed your family, but darned if you oughtn't to be made to hang on that fool fence of yours, and let the

robins feed you.' But I must be going, as I'm in an awful rush."

Paragraph had, with studied carelessness, wandered away from the group, and was now sidling up toward Susanna, who was busying herself among the crocks and pans in the milk-house, apparently utterly oblivious of the coming of the swain, although in reality she had observed his zigzag approach, and was watching him out of the corner of her eye.

"Ah, the enchanted bower!"

Paragraph's tone was half a salutation, and she wheeled quickly, as though quite startled.

"Enchanted fiddlesticks! It's the milk-house, and half the milk's soured." It was plain to be seen that Susanna was miffed about something.

"Why this sharpness of tongue, oh, fair one?" This in his most injured tone.

A heavy frown, and a vigorous scouring of a pan that was already as bright as a mirror was the only response.

"Ha! The sunlight shadowed, the brightness of glorious morn darkened by a frowning cloud."

"'Most any one could say pretty speeches if they'd practised as much as you have, William Miller."

Whenever Susanna referred to him as "William Miller," he knew there was lively skirmishing ahead. He was totally ignorant of the cause of this unexpected mood in which he had found her, and, man-like, he first whistled, and then scratched his head.

However, he determined to stay on the firing-line.

"If pretty speeches come trippingly from my tongue, 'tis surely because I have framed them for thee; 'tis because I oft have spoken them to visions which I glorified by the charming name of Susanna."

A rattle of the pans and a toss of the head, but no word in reply.

"Oh, woman, in our hours of ease
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please."

He contrived to inject a shade of bitterness into his voice.

"Better try to please that other girl."

His eyes opened. He was world-wise enough to know that the "enemy" was about to break cover and come out into the open.

"Ah, ha! So it is a female Ethiopian concealed in the wood-pile. What other girl, lovely lady?"

"You are innocent, for sure! That little minx you were caught holding in your arms the other day."

"I, holding a girl in my arms?"

"Oh, you can't pull the wool over my eyes. I'd be ashamed if I was you. Joe said —"

"So *Joe* said, did he? Then Joe shall answer to me. By the living gods, the blood of a long line of Millers courses hotly through my veins." He turned fiercely, but with a little cry she stopped him.

"Oh, I didn't mean to mention his name."

"Nevertheless, he shall rue his words."

"But what — *what* do you intend to do?"

"Do? *Do?* Call him out as they did in the days of old when knights were bold. He shall meet me on the field of honor, and in a bloody duel to the death, this base thing shall be wiped out!" Sweeping off his hat, he rumpled up his hair and flirled his wrist as though testing his trusty broadsword.

"Oh, please don't talk that way. Joe didn't mean any harm." Then with jealousy again conquering, she added: "But I don't care; you had no business holding that girl in your arms there in that boat."

She turned with a pout to the milk-pans once more. Paragraph stood staring at her a moment; then the lines about his face began to change from a frown to a broad grin as the light of knowledge kindled in his eyes. Then he broke into a roar of laughter, and leaned against the door while he wiped the tears of merriment from his eyes. Susanna looked up in astonishment, and then, with her face scarlet with wounded dignity, she tried to pass him, but he barred the way.

"So that's the girl you mean."

"It certainly is, Mr. Miller."

"But I couldn't help it. Honest, I couldn't."

A frigid silence was his reward, and he hastily continued:

"You see, she was out rowing on the Wabash

alone, and in some way she got into the water. I was not far away in another boat, so I — well, I wanted to swim a little, so I just helped her back into the boat. She was about half-drowned, and I couldn't help putting my arms around her in getting her out of the river. That's all there is to it."

"*All* there is to it?"

"Why — er — yes."

"But wasn't that enough? Oh, Will, what a hero you are."

She beamed upon him in a most captivating manner, and he, quick to note his opportunity, seized her by both hands and drew her to him.

"You remember that question you asked me last night, Will," she said, coyly, after a mighty sigh.

"How could I forget it, adored one? It has pulsed through my brain every moment since, and alternate hope and fear have so wrought upon me that I am but a mere shadow of myself of yesterday. Speak, oh, speak the word, my queen, that shall enhance the glory of the sunshine."

"I — I think I'll say 'yes.'"

"And the day?"

"Whenever you wish."

He studied a moment. "Ah, I have it! We'll elope."

"Elope? Why, there's no cause for that."

"Cause enough. It's romantic. Look at Jap Munson. He followed dull routine in his courtship; got married with everybody knowing all about it

for days before, and then settled down in a rut to talk politics and swing a blacksnake. None of that for me. Now look at young Lochinvar. He stole his bride from another man at the altar, and is famed in poesy."

"I know, but then —"

"Yes, I know I can't get any one else to lead you to the altar — I mean I don't want any one else to lead you to the altar — but we'll steal away some beauteous night, and before the dawn shall have lifted the sombre curtains, we will be wed."

A report like the crack of a pistol interrupted the plot, and, looking around, they saw Munson's whip circling for another pop.

"Susanna," he called, "wife wants you to come over and help her piece a quilt one day next week."

The old man and Joe had accompanied him to the road, so Paragraph deemed it wise to join them. Munson climbed into his wagon and, with a crack of the whip, started.

"Whoa!" he shouted a moment later, and, turning in his seat, called back to the group at the fence: "I'll be along this evening after them stamps. Git up." The whip popped once more, after forming a perfect figure "8" about his head, and the wagon rattled out of sight. Wayne shrewdly surmised that the cause of Munson's stop was in order to afford him another opportunity to display his dexterity with the blacksnake.

CHAPTER IV.

WALKED WITH A LIMP

BIDDING Wayne go to his room and prepare his sermon for the morrow, the farmer and his son, accompanied by the reporter, went to the barn to overhaul some harness. Left to his own devices, the preacher strolled slowly back toward the house. The warm sun had called forth the industrious inhabitants of half a dozen beehives, and their low droning hum came to his ears as he neared the house. The watch-dog lazily arose from its shady retreat on the porch and came forward, wagging a welcome. He smiled as he patted the shaggy head, and thought how like the noble animal's trustfulness had been his welcome into this home. His explanation of ill-health in active pulpit work, and a desire to seek a broader experience among his fellow men, had been glibly spoken, it is true, and the readiness with which the words were received as truth had caused him to blush a little, and had drawn his heart toward these new-found friends as nothing else could have done. Pausing a moment to pet the dog, he decided not to enter the house. Aimlessly he strolled about, and then suddenly paused. Before him was the hammock,

and in it lay Lorraine Wilson. A book she had been reading lay by her side, and a great red rose rested carelessly on her bosom. She had evidently fallen into a doze while reading.

Long and earnestly he studied the fair face, and the same pallor that had come to him when he had observed her in the moonlight on the foot-log crept into his cheeks now, and a weakness came over him. His lips grew dry, and, trembling, he turned away, but an irresistible impulse caused him to once more turn his burning gaze upon the features of the sleeper. A tress of golden hair had escaped from its companions, and now a vagrant breeze caught it up in a wild glee dance and flung it like a caress across the face of the girl, and she opened her eyes to catch the burning, staring gaze of the preacher full upon her. A wave of red mounted slowly to her temples. In a moment his hat was off and he was stammering apologies.

"I assure you I meant no impertinence," he said.

"How stupid of me to have fallen asleep."

The reply he recognized as a compromise. It did not accord pardon, nor deny it. The voice came to him like an echo of — but he resolutely faced the present, and with his tongue moistened his lips, which were parched as if with a fever.

"I was pondering on — on a certain subject, and did not observe that the hammock was occupied until I was very close. You awoke just in time to detect what no doubt appeared an impertinent stare. May I not be forgiven?"

The response was a gay laugh that rippled in such musical sweetness that he wondered if she had been taught it by the wild birds.

"Why, Rev — I mean Mr. Wayne, one would think that you had been detected in a heinous crime, judging from your tone. I was a little startled, perhaps, but I am sure that no offense was meant, and therefore I absolve you from any blame."

"It is good of you," he murmured, awkwardly, trying to frame the words that would permit him to slip away.

There was a slight pause. She had caught a rope and was swinging herself gently.

"It will seem like old times to have sermons in the little church once more," she said.

"I trust that I may be able to make the services of interest and profit to those who attend." His voice sounded strangely formal, he told himself, and he struggled for more complete self-possession.

"And your sermon for to-morrow, have you it prepared?"

"To tell the truth, I haven't. I think I shall have to depend much on inspiration to-morrow. Somehow, I do not feel in the mood to-day to write a sermon. This is a most beautiful locality." The last remark was far from relevant, but he had formed a resolve.

"The Valley of the Wabash embraces some picturesque spots, I assure you, Mr. Wayne. The 'Sunny South' may be more famous in song, but

the Indiana of to-day is one of our Uncle Samuel's fairest gardens."

"Do you think it equals Florida?"

The question was put with apparent carelessness, but Wayne felt that the quaver in his voice betrayed his eagerness and the purpose that he had endeavored to veil.

The girl flashed him a sudden look of doubt, much the same as when he had referred to her midnight walk through the woods. She was silent for a time, toying idly with the rose. Wayne dropped into a rustic bench and kicked at a leaf.

"That's rather a strange question, Mr. Wayne."

"Then I withdraw it with an apology."

"But I should like to know what prompted it. What caused you to consider me a judge of Florida's charms?"

He was hardly prepared to answer, but he did so slowly and carefully, as if groping his way in the dark: "It must be that because I spent so many years there, I thought everybody must be acquainted with the State."

"I never was in Florida."

He looked up quickly, surprise betraying itself in his eyes, and then, seeing that she was observing him closely, changed the subject abruptly.

"That is a beautiful rose," he said.

"And yet, see, just behind this petal there is a great, cruel thorn."

"It is life."

"It is life, indeed. And too often are the thorns

intentionally concealed by the petals." She had stopped the swaying of the hammock.

"But if the giver does not see the thorn when he offers the rose?"

"In that case, though the wound would be as deep, there should be forgiveness for the donor."

"Practically the words of Christ, 'Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.'"

"And yet there is no quality so rare as that of forgiveness."

"My contention. It is the test of the Christ spirit."

"Then why not make it the burden of your sermon? I am sure you could present the plea in such a manner that it would touch the heart of my — of many. There are those in the world who worship God devoutly, but who have not a forgiving spirit for those who have wounded their pride. You say you shall depend on inspiration. Then let this be your inspiration." She held out to him the rose, and he took it with a feeling of reverence. "'The Rose and the Thorn, a Plea for Forgiveness.' Is not that a good subject?"

She had slipped out of the hammock and stood before him now, an eager light in her eyes, her hands clasped as though in prayer.

"It is a subject that appeals to me strongly. I shall weave my sermon around it." He pinned the blushing flower to the lapel of his coat. Then he noticed how cheap and poor the coat looked, but, after a moment's hesitation, he let the rose remain.

A wren, perched in the branches above, began a trilling carol, and a robin joined in with his deeper notes.

"Your choir has begun rehearsal," she said, with a laugh.

"Then I presume it is time to listen for a quarrel between the soprano and the bass. They always have a tilt, you know."

"That is one tribulation you will escape as pastor of the Walnut Grove Church, for the little flock depends on congregational singing."

"And who shall say that it is not more inspiring than the so-called 'cultivated' voices of a salaried choir, looking forward to Easter as a heaven-sent time for the display of their spring bonnets, and to criticize the bonnets of others?"

"What a sensation you would create in a city church, Mr. Wayne. You will have to stifle those ideas when you leave this bit of Arcadia to take your place in the world."

"My place in the world? I have been in the Wabash Valley but a brief while, but I think that in the future 'my place in the world' is here."

"Surely you are jesting."

"Certainly I am not. Like others of the race of man, I have had 'ups and downs,' but there is in the woods, the rolling hills, the breath from the Wabash, a restfulness that I have not found elsewhere. If 'home is where the heart is,' my home is here."

"It must have been a case of love at first sight."

She sat down in the hammock again, and then half-reclined, and one dainty foot peeping from beneath her skirts tapped the ground and rocked the hammock.

“Nevertheless, a wee voice keeps singing to me:

“The storms of life may fiercely blow,
And sorrow in surging tides may flow,
Whatever may come, come joy, come woe,
Still here, here, here, thy refuge forever, forever is here!”

He had regained his self-control and rendered the bit of song with an unconscious fervor. She was silent, but he saw a tear stealing down from her half-averted eyes. His lips parted, but he checked the speech and waited.

“Where did you learn that song, Mr. Wayne?” she asked at last.

“At college, I think. Is it a favorite of yours?”

“Yes.”

He waited for her to say more, but she did not. Instead, she plucked a leaf from a low-hanging bough and nervously pinched it into tiny bits.

“Do you sing it?” he asked.

“No.”

She rolled the bits of leaf into a ball and then flung it from her at random. In his heart he knew that she would resent any further inquiries on the subject.

“You have voiced a very pretty sentiment, Mr. Wayne, and I am sure that you have earned the plaudits and friendship of every Hoosier.”

"I think I shall be glad to become a 'Hoosier.' The name has been more or less intimately associated with hoop-poles and pumpkins in the past, it is true, but then Rome was mistress of the civilized world in spite of the shadow of the arena."

"And we are told that the cackling of geese saved Rome," she replied.

"And you mean — what?"

"Oh, my meaning is obvious, I think. Anyway, the country's attention was drawn closely to Indiana's hoop-poles and pumpkins, but they 'who came to scoff remained to pray.' The inquiring glances that were turned toward our State were rewarded with bird's-eye views of one of the leading commonwealths of the country, a State whose culture rivals that of the effete East."

"And whose women are loyal 'Hoosiers,'" he added, with a faint smile.

"Because we are proud of the title. It is a synonym for 'industry' and 'progress.' Indiana sometimes thinks and says some harsh things about those who heralded our hoop-poles and pumpkins to the world, but, after all, I believe that the State owes them a debt of gratitude for directing the gaze of humanity this way."

"In that case, it was the petals concealed by the thorns. Mankind felt the prick of the sticker and discovered the fragrant flower."

She gave him a look of gratitude. "Mr. Wayne, you are proving such an enthusiast that I have about decided to make a confidant of you, and ask your

assistance in solving that which is a mystery to me."

"I fear that I would prove an indifferent detective, but I would feel honored by your confidence."

"I think your Southern training has taught you a suspicion of flattery," she said, with mock severity.

"It has taught me to revere the truth and to be natural."

"But to the point." She suddenly faced him, and in her tone was deep earnestness. "Can you imagine why two strange men with a pick and a spade should be skulking about this farm at midnight?"

Somehow the expression, "skulking about this farm at midnight," seemed a slap in his face, branding him with a measure of guilt he had not thought of before. Without waiting for a reply, she poured forth the story of the meeting in the woods while on her way home the night before, with the facts of which he was fully conversant. However, he dissembled and managed to display surprise at the proper points in the recital. How could he tell her that he, too, was skulking in the woods at midnight, and that with trembling limbs he was following her when she had encountered the men? And could he tell her that he knew she was evading the truth when she had declared that she had never been in Florida?

His brain was in a tangle. He felt that he was not sure of anything. Did he not know that along the banks of the Suwanee there had once wan-

dered in happy abandon a slip of a girl, with the blue of the violet nestling deep in her eye, with features fair and indelibly stamped on his memory, with a shapely head crowned with a wealth of golden hair, whose laugh was merry as the wild birds' trill? Was not this a reality? Was not this engraved on the pages of yesterday, or was he suddenly awakening from some peculiar mental delusion? He had once heard a noted specialist on mental diseases say that to the insane nothing was so real as the unreal. Briefly he recalled the years that had gone. The synopsis of his life was clear. His mind was not at fault. He could even recall having added his boyish baritone voice to a darky serenade one day at a picnic by the river, and, as the darkies had rowed the party homeward that night, he could remember how the soft rays of the Southern moon had glinted on the water; he could see yet the sprawling shadows of stately pine-trees that grew on the bank. He saw the bend in the river free from the shadows, and in the bow of the boat sat a slip of a girl, in whose spun-gold tresses the moonbeams danced. He heard the lap, lap, lapping of the water, as it embraced the boat, and he heard once more the song of the dusky oarsmen, and he remembered how they had all joined in on the chorus:

"Oh, the Suwanee River, slipping along,
Is not a dream, but a liquid song."

And yet before him now sat this girl, radiantly fair, and in his dreams a divinity, and with the

violet's blue reflecting in the windows of her soul, assuring him that she was a stranger to Florida. Was he to believe that the most crucial hours of his life were but shadows on a disordered brain? A joy leaped into his heart at the thought. It was a solace. But the reaction came in a moment, and left in his hands the ashes of this hope. The tangle in his brain became a snarl, and, out of all the conflicting emotions and hopes and doubts, he was sure of but one thing. He was certain that it was inexpressibly pleasant to be sitting thus, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot," conversing with this young lady who was to him at once a sunbeam and a shadow from the past, a tie of tangled lights and shadows between the Suwanee and the Wabash. He assured her that the men with the pick and spade very probably were belated laborers returning home after a carousal.

"Perhaps," she said, and looked away.

The old farmer came out into the yard and scanned the sky in a critical manner.

"You will be favored with nice weather for your first service, Mr. Wayne," he observed, using a large palm-leaf fan vigorously. The girl sprang from the hammock.

"Come, take a swing, father."

"No, I think I prefer the rustic," and he seated himself beside Wayne.

"The hammock is certainly more comfortable," persisted the daughter.

"But the settee is more reliable," was the re-

sponse. "Hammocks are all right for the young, but a man of my years would prove a sorry acrobat in case it should take a tantrum, and it is my observation that hammocks are subject to tantrums." He smiled at his own quiet humor, and motioned her back to the hammock.

"You have predicted fair weather for me, beware of the squalls for yourself. Stick to the old reliable rustic," was Wayne's laughing advice, and the old man stretched himself at his ease and fanned vigorously.

"The world is getting pretty swift nowadays, Mr. Wayne. When I came to Tyler County, ox-teams were rapid transit. To-day they are planning an electric line that will pick the farmer up at his door and set him down at his neighbor's or in town, just as he chooses."

"Then it is really a fact that Tyler County is to have an electric line?"

"So Mr. Miller says, and I must say that young man seems to know everything —"

"Except 'possums," broke in the girl, the corners of her mouth twitching.

The old man chuckled. "Well, he knows more about that subject than he did twenty-four hours ago, I guess. But the Riverside papers have been full of electric-line talk for some time, so I guess he's right."

"And it is to pass right by our house, Mr. Wayne, — that is, if they get the right of way," added Lorraine.

The farmer sighed. "Yes, there's going to be trouble on that subject, I fear. One company has been sending its agents around among the farmers, trying to get them in a mood to vote a subsidy for the road, but another company is now declaring its willingness to build the line without any subsidy, if they can get the right of way."

"Then I should think the question would be easy of settlement," said Wayne.

"Not so easy as it might at first appear. The first company declares that it means business and will build the road, and that the other fellows are engaged in an attempt to get the county into their hands, so to speak, and then sell out to Eastern capitalists, who, after dilly-dallying and driving the other fellows out of the field, will demand a bigger subsidy than ever. The question of ordering a special election for the purpose of voting on the subsidy proposition is now before the board of county commissioners."

"A rural route for free mail delivery is to be established in this vicinity in a few months, Mr. Wayne," added the girl. "And then, with an electric line at our doors, we will be in town in the country. Oh, yes, a farmer's coöperative telephone company is being organized, also, and we can soon sit in our houses and listen to your sermons at Walnut Grove Church." She had left the hammock and was standing at her father's side, stroking his white locks with an unconscious tenderness.

"There were two men at my house a day or two

ago, talking subsidy," said the farmer, full of the subject, though Wayne was heartily tired of it. But the old man's next words put him in a different mood. "I don't like their looks, somehow. One of them was dressed like a Dunkard, but I believe he did that for effect. The other fellow did all of the talking. He seemed to be the leader, and, when he went limping away, the Dunkard followed like a pet dog."

Wayne suddenly roused, and, slapping his hat on his head, faced the farmer eagerly.

"Limped away, did you say?" He looked at the girl out of the corner of his eye as he asked the question, but if he expected the query to affect her in any way he was disappointed.

"Well, a sort of a limp. I couldn't help but notice his walk. Seemed like something was wrong with one knee."

"Lorraine! Lo-r-r-aine!" The voice came from the house.

"Coming, mother. You must excuse me, Mr. Wayne," and she ran across the lawn with an easy gracefulness that brought back vividly to the preacher the memory of the night before, when he had seen her dart away from the men in the woods.

"Guess I'll go in, too. You can have it all to yourself for study." And the old man walked slowly toward the house.

Wayne sat with wrinkled brow a moment. Then he smote the rustic arm with his open palm, as though conviction had entered his mind.

“Limped away.” The words had given him a thread which he hoped would unravel at least a part of the tangled skein. He recalled now that the man who had carried the spade walked with a peculiar halting movement of his right leg. And memory brought to him the face of another man, and his lips tightened into a straight line as the name came to his tongue. But he did not utter the word. Instead, he spat upon the ground. His contempt and loathing for the name was such that, even when alone, he would not give it utterance. But in the force of sudden thought his tongue had half-curved to pronounce it, and it seemed to leave a bad taste in his mouth.

He arose and paced nervously back and forth under the trees. The perfume of lilacs was in the air and stole to his brain like an anæsthetic of the gods sent to calm and ease the torturing pain of wild regrets, of memory assailed by doubts, of the present stung by suspicions. “Limped away.” The words seemed burning themselves into his soul. Then he laughed aloud, and the watch-dog, which had curled up contentedly under a cherry-tree for a doze, opened its eyes and half-arose, startled by the scornfulness of his laugh. He was a fool, he told himself, and this sudden outburst of unnatural merriment was an acknowledgment of the fact. Supposing the electric-line agent did limp, and supposing the man with the spade had a most peculiar gait, what of it? It proved nothing. He felt that his laugh was not sufficient acknowledgment of his

folly in attaching weight to such trifles as a limp. He must speak his self-ridicule. A boy whistling along a lonely road at the weird hours of night may feel his courage rising, but by breaking into a shouting, rollicking song he increases his self-assurance tenfold. Wayne turned to the dog.

"I am a fool!" he declared, solemnly. The dog seemed to realize that something was expected of him, so he wagged his tail in hearty approval. The preacher felt a smile in the muscles of his face, but it did not live to reach his lips.

"Glad to see that you agree with me," he continued, with grim humor. "I *must* be a fool to get worked up over vapors. A limp! Pah! Thousands of men limp, Bruno, and you know it!" Another vigorous tail wagging. "The man with the spade and the electric-line promoter may have been the same, but what of it? Nothing of it. Of course I don't know what he was doing in the woods, but I'll find out. But that is neither here nor there in this case that you and I are considering, Bruno. We know it wasn't — him. We *know* it wasn't. Fate plays strange pranks with mortals; fiction is solvable, a mere tracing of the human mind, but fate is unsolvable, the demonstrations of a divine power. Aye, it plays strange pranks, for has it not brought me to — her?" His voice sank to a whisper. He stroked the head of the animal a moment in silence.

"I do not question the workings of fate, Bruno, for it is omnipotent, but my theology does not teach

me that the grave ever gives up its dead until that Great Day, when we shall all be judged. The promoter limped and the night-prowler limped, but the dead do not limp. There are coincidences, Bruno, but the age of miracles passed when Christ paid the debt of the world upon the Cross. We are told that He sits on the Father's right hand and intercedes for us. The great God knows it all, Bruno! The Christ who passed from the Manger to the Cross knows the weaknesses of men, and the innocent and the guilty are recorded; the motives of an action are placed in the scales, and we shall not suffer beyond our deserts, Bruno. Glory and praise to God, we shall be judged rightly there!"

He sank to his knees and with outstretched arms poured out the words, his voice trembling with emotion and rising plaintively, as if appealing to the faithful animal who now crept into his arms and laid his muzzle against the face of the sobbing man. A human heart was crying out for sympathy; a soul was groping for vindication; the reason of man was appealing to the instinct of the brute, and instinct rose superior to reason and accorded justice where reason had measured out injustice. The dog, with its dumb caresses, was declaring confidence and fealty. The man rose to his feet, and the soft winds kissed the moisture from his eyes. The anæsthetic of the gods was stealing from his heart the pain. He walked aimlessly, uncertainly away. A butterfly hovered for a moment on the rim of his

hat, and he paused lest he disturb it. Then it flew away.

"God's humblest creatures are my friends," he said, and walked on.

When he stopped the broad turnpike lay before him. A paling fence, painted white, separated the yard from the road, and he leaned against this, his elbows on the stringer. Rays of heat danced in the sunlight, and over in the woods pasture the cattle lay or stood in the shelter of the walnut-trees, exerting themselves only to switch the flies away with their ever swinging tails. A woodpecker drummed on the gaunt skeleton of a tree, and the sound came to him with startling distinctness. A cloud of dust arose where the road made a turn a quarter of a mile away, and a buggy came in sight. Mechanically he watched it approaching, the horse jog-trotting just fast enough to keep ahead of its own dust cloud and not fast enough to be wearisome. The driver, evidently a farmer in prosperous circumstances, nodded pleasantly and passed on. Other rigs followed more or less closely. A wagon with two spring seats and drawn by a spirited team rattled by, the farmer and his wife and son occupying the front seat, while his three daughters, bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked lasses in cool-looking dresses and many ribbons, scrouged together in the last seat, the entire family giving the man at the fence a look of inquiring curiosity as they passed on.

"On to Craigville for Saturday shopping and visiting," said a voice behind him.

Wayne recognized the tones of Paragraph before he turned. The reporter stood fanning himself with his straw hat clutched in one hand, and mopping his brow with a handkerchief held in the other. A honey-bee came sailing by, and he flicked at it with his kerchief.

"Get in the shade, my busy, buzzy friend, or you'll get sunstruck," he said.

The preacher laughed. His was a buoyant nature, and, having been forced into the slough of despond, his spirits were now responding to the reaction.

"Parson," said the reporter, stuffing his handkerchief back into his pocket, "there may be 'rare' days in June, but this one is well done."

"It certainly is warm to-day."

"Warm! Your words are impotent. You should have been born a woman. A woman can gad about on a scorching day and keep every hair just so, every piece of linen unsoiled, her face perfectly dry and calm-looking. Of course she may fan a little, but she acts as though it is for style rather than because it's hot. How about a man? Wet with perspiration, his clothes bedraggled, his hair mussed up, his face like a lobster!"

"I really believe you are right, Mr. Miller."

"Of course I'm right. But don't call me 'Mr. Miller.' No one does that except a creditor, or Susanna when she has a cyclone up her sleeve. Make it 'Bill,' or 'Paragraph.'"

"Then it shall be Paragraph. If there's merit in advertising you shall have your calling known."

"That's good. I always shy at the 'Mister.' A man who has hunted rabbits, walnuts, and paw-paws with you all your life and called you 'Bill' from the date of your first school day, will stiffen his neck and address you as 'Mister' when he has a bill to collect. Sort of wants you to know that you can't take refuge behind the walnut-tree, I guess."

He was once more mopping the perspiration from his brow. Then suddenly he waved his hat at a young man in a buggy, and shouted:

"Hello, Jim!"

With an exclamation of surprise the driver stopped, and Miller hopped over the fence and ran out to shake hands with him. After a moment's conversation the man spoke to his horse and drove on, laughing heartily at something the reporter had said.

"That's Jim Gordon," said Miller, returning to Wayne, and climbing back over the picket fence as carefully as though he considered it a dangerous feat. "Jim's the duly accredited country correspondent for the *Sun* from this section. He never fails to mention the fact that 'So-and-so has a new rubber-tired buggy. Put on your best smiles, girls;' 'Items are scarce as hen's teeth;' 'The assessor is abroad in the land. Take to the caves;' 'The politician is tuning up for his siren song to the voters.'"

"Do you keep them in type ready for use?" asked the preacher, laughing.

"Oh, no, we pay him the compliment of setting them up each time. But Jim's all right. He works in lots of good stuff, and always has his eyes open for the *Sun*. We have a big list of subscribers in this community as a result. Everlasting hustle with attention to small things is the price of a good subscription list. That motto ought to be framed in every country newspaper office."

Wayne nodded. He enjoyed his companion's talk, and was gaining an insight into the inner life of the community, something he very much desired.

"Jim's got as fine an eighty-acre farm as there is around here, too," continued Miller. "He lives with his parents, though, and rents his farm. There's where Lorraine boards, when she's teaching."

"Ah!" Wayne mumbled the exclamation. He found himself glancing down the road at the buggy disappearing in a little cloud of dust, and he wished that he had taken a better look at Mr. James Gordon.

"Folks say Jim's heels over head in love with Lorraine, and that he's been trying to get the trustee to add another month to the school term, in order to keep her near him."

The dust cloud down the road still hung in the air, and Wayne scowled at it. He knew of no reason for doing so, but the patch of gray slowly dis-

appearing across the fields annoyed him. He turned to Paragraph.

"You have known her a long time?"

"Several years."

"And — and I believe she has — been — married once, has she not?"

Miller placed his hat on his head again, rammed his hands deep into his pockets, and then looked hard at the preacher.

"Parson," he said, "I took a liking to you from the first, and as a friend I advise you to go lie down. The heat has affected your head."

Wayne reddened under the rather scathing sarcasm. "But I had that impression, somehow," he said, slowly.

"A lot of people once had the impression that the moon was made of green cheese, too."

"I don't want to be impertinent or persistent, but perhaps she was — away from here for a time and — was married then." He was determined to press the subject, now that the die was cast.

Miller said nothing for a moment. Then he spoke carefully and distinctly, as though weighing each word before voicing it.

"She was away, it is true. She attended a seminary down South some place, I forget where. But she was not married."

"You are certain?"

"Are you certain of the divine inspiration of the holy writ?" Miller's manner had sobered, and was deeply earnest.

"Then perhaps Gordon's suit may prosper."

"I have not presumed to judge her private affairs." Then, as if conscious that his tone and words were unduly sharp, he added, in a softer mood: "But the man who wins her must be all that the name implies. However, so far as I know, Gordon is all of that."

Wayne made no reply, but turned again to the fence and rested his elbows on the stringer.

"Are you going to Craigville with Joe and me, this afternoon?" he asked, irrelevantly.

"I think not. Major Wilson (that's the old man's title, you know) discovered a weak place in his corn-crib this morning, and I promised to help him fix it this afternoon. I am rather overstaying my usual visit, and I feel that I ought to earn my bread. The Major would feel hurt if he heard me express it in that way, but Craigville has no charms for me and — this farm — has. So I'll stay here."

"Then your visits are not usually as long as this?"

"Nope. Fact is, Parson, I have decided to stay over another day to hear you preach."

"Miller, you don't know how I appreciate that. I hardly know what I shall say, but the kindness I have received here ought to inspire one to preach the love of God and the brotherhood of man."

"Best people in the world, right here on the Wabash."

The two had turned, and were walking slowly back toward the hammock. Wayne made a move-

ment as though to occupy the hammock, then suddenly changed his mind, and sat down in the rustic.

"I believe I'll rest here a bit and try to study out a line of thought for my sermon," he said.

"Then I'll leave you alone in your glory, for I might cause your think-tank to spring a leak." Paragraph walked away, his thumbs in the arm-holes of his vest, and whistling a gay topical song of the day.

Why had he not taken the hammock? Wayne asked himself the question, but found no answer. Some distorted fancy had impressed him that it would be a trespass, and that was all he could muster as an excuse. He knew the fancy was distorted. He congratulated himself that he knew it.

"You're a fool, Bob Wayne." It acted as a safety-valve, and he felt better.

Rising, he went into the house. No one was in sight, and he passed into his room and closed the door. Taking off his coat he threw it on the bed, and then suddenly clutched at it. In the buttonhole was a great red rose, and he unpinned it, throwing the coat back. Claspings the rose in both hands, he held it before him and drank in its beauty.

"Let this be your inspiration."

An inspiration for his sermon on forgiveness. Could there be a greater inspiration than that which was rending his soul? He caught his breath with a gasp. From another room came the words of a song, in a subdued tone, sweetened with the quaver of age:

“Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly.”

He sank to his knees, his hands clasping the flower.

“Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on thee.”

His head drooped, and a fervent prayer welled up from his heart while his frame shook with emotion. His eyes were hidden in his arms, and a plea for God's mercy swept the fibres of his soul.

“Leave, oh, leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me.”

The fragrance of the rose, the anæsthetic of the gods, crept into his brain and stilled its throbbing. Out of the darkness a great Cross gleamed white and clear, and at its foot stood an angel with golden hair, clothed in white, and with a sceptre of roses pointing him to Calvary.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN CRAIGVILLE AWOKE

CRAIGVILLE had yawned and stretched herself after her week's doze. The rattle of farm-wagons and the bustling of farmers and their families had injected a new energy into the town.

The business part of the village was built in an "L" shape, the long stem (but not very long in this instance) being flanked on either side by grocery stores, a hardware store, notion stores, a bank, and general merchandise stores. In the centre of this row of commerce was a large, square-built frame house with a long bench on the walk in front, and on this bench half a dozen of the town loafers and wits sunned themselves, whittled on odd sticks, and spat at the cracks in the board walk, with very indifferent aim. A triangular cloth-covered sign extending out over the walk bore in black square letters, a trifle uneven, the words, "Tyler House." Jacob Hausman, the proprietor and landlord, had originally named the hostelry the "Craigville House," but when the cloth and board part of the sign was completed, it was found that the

name was altogether too long for the space by about three letters, so as the sign did not fit the name, a name had to be chosen to fit the sign.

"The old story of Mahomet and the mountain," said Jacob, shaking his fat sides with laughter, as though the joke was thoroughly enjoyable. "It's a proud old name, anyway. 'Tippecanoe and Tyler, too.' If a man with that name could be old 'Tippecanoe' Harrison's running mate and occupy the Vice-Presidential chair, and if this here county can go right on raising the best crops in the State under the name of Tyler, I guess Jake Hausman can keep a tavern by that name."

This was one of the longest speeches that Jacob had ever been known to make, but the occasion demanded something out of the ordinary. A rival had once tried to compete with Hausman in the hotel business, but he soon gave it up. The rivals were at every train coming into the town, Hausman fat, full-blooded, and the picture of good health; his rival, scrawny, hollow-cheeked, and looking as though he had an engagement with the undertaker. One glance at the two who stood side by side on the station platform soliciting patronage, and the traveler invariably handed his grip to Hausman, certain that a hotel that nourished that hearty-looking being was the one for a hungry man to seek.

"Nature's handicapped me, and I give up," said the rival, after a few weeks of disappointment, and he took down his sign.

On the short spur of the "L" was a livery-stable, a coal office, and a blacksmith shop, the latter presided over by Mr. Timothy Craig, whose paternal grandfather had built the first cabin on the site of the present village, more than half a century before. Peace and plenty had come, smiling, to the community, but the rush and roar of traffic had selected Riverside for its vortex, leaving a quiet, peaceful growth and existence for Craigville, as it came to be known when the railroad pushed a line up through that section.

When Joe and Wayne drove up to the blacksmith shop that afternoon, with two big farm horses plodding behind their buggy, they found the shop deserted for the time being; that is, deserted by all except the smith, who sat on an empty nail keg near the door, his head in his hands and his elbows on his knees, industriously studying a scrap of paper spread out on his leathern apron.

"Wake up, Tim!" shouted Joe, springing from the buggy, closely followed by Wayne.

Timothy looked up, then, without replying, turned his attention once more to the paper, while the two men tied the horse they had driven and led the two others into the shop.

"Confound it, Joe, you made me lose them!" exclaimed Craig, in a tone of vexation.

"Lose what, — a few winks of sleep?"

"Sleep, nothing! Look here!" He held up a picture torn from a newspaper. "There's the puzzle picture printed in this week's *Sun*, and it's a

tough one, I tell you. I had it just about worked when you made me jump, and now I'll be dinged if I can make heads or tails out of it."

"Oh, you'll find it after awhile. In the meantime, shake hands with Reverend Wayne, Mr. Craig."

The smith got up from the keg, and, after carefully wiping his hands on the under side of his apron, grasped the preacher's hand and gave it a shake that reminded Wayne of a time when he had once unwittingly picked up the handle of an electric battery.

As Craig stood before him the preacher had a chance to measure him. Tall and angular, he was the picture of health unhampered by surplus flesh. A square jaw and a hawk-like nose were the features of his face, which was plentifully adorned with freckles, and a mass of tawny hair showed the route traveled by smutty fingers in pushing it back from his brow. Wayne felt that he should like the smith.

"Are you much on puzzle pictures, Parson?" asked Craig.

"I must confess that I am a poor hand at them," replied Wayne, amused at the other's deep interest in the subject.

"No, no, Tim, he don't care anything about puzzle pictures. We want to get some shoes tacked on these horses. Never mind the puzzle."

"All right, Joe, but that's the best one the *Sun*

ever printed. Bess said she never was so interested in one before."

"Um — ah — she did, eh? Well, now, they are interesting, that's a fact." He had started for the door, but now, with rather a sheepish glance at Wayne, he turned back. "Let's see that paper, Tim."

Tim set down his kit of tools, and fished the paper out of his pocket.

"By the way, are you well, Tim?" asked Joe.

"The despair of undertakers," the smith responded, expanding his chest.

"And your mother?"

"Tolerable." He unfolded the paper, holding it by the outer edges in order to keep it from being soiled.

"Oh, yes, and how is — Bess?"

Wayne glanced at him, and noted the telltale flush on his handsome young face, and understood, but Tim had comprehension for nothing but the baffling lines of the puzzle.

"Pert as ever," he said, mechanically. "She's helping at the post-office again to-day. But if this ain't the best puzzle you ever looked at, I'm a goat. Listen, and I'll read it to you: 'A Search for Captain Kidd's Buried Treasure. Find two men, one with a pick and one with a shovel.'"

"What do you mean? Let's see that paper!" Wayne snatched it, believing that the smith was playing a part, but he had read aright. He bit his lip, and handed the paper back. After all, how

could Craig know anything about the two men in real life? He must learn more self-control.

"I told you it was interesting, Joe. Got the Parson all worked up a'ready. Hey?"

Joe looked inquiringly at his companion, puzzled by his sudden outburst.

Wayne forced a laugh. "Yes, it almost upset me. You see, when I was a boy — I — saw a — puzzle picture which — read like that. I wondered if it was the same." For the sake of others he could not tell the truth just then, and he felt that the untruth would be forgiven him.

"Well, that would stir a fellow some," admitted Tim, going to the bellows and beginning to pump the fire into a blaze.

Joe sat down on the keg with the picture in his hand, and pretended to be studying it. "Some Sunday you and Bess and your mother had better drive out to Walnut Grove Church. Mr. Wayne is going to preach there," he said, with an attempt at carelessness.

"Shucks! You don't say! Goin' to preach at Walnut Grove, eh? Well, it's been quite a spell since there's been any Bible pounding — I mean, preaching — there." He gave the fire a vigorous poke to cover his confusion. "What denomination?" he asked, turning to Wayne, who was standing in the doorway.

"Com — I mean, we've agreed to let denominations alone, and stick to the Bible."

"Good thing. Denominations fight while the

devil laughs. 'Stick to the Bible and vote the Republican ticket.' That's my motto." He had jerked one old shoe off a horse and was paring the hoof.

"Well, I think I can steer clear of politics," said Wayne, good-naturedly.

"What? In *Indiana!*" exclaimed the smith, dropping the hoof.

"Certainly. Why not?"

Timothy strode to the forge, and tucked a shoe in the fire, covering it carefully with the glowing coals. Then he seized the bellows handle and began forcing the draught. He looked at Wayne almost scornfully.

"Why not? Why *not?* Why don't violets grow in Klondike? Why don't icebergs float in the Gulf of Mexico? Because the atmosphere won't permit of it, that's why. That's your answer, too."

Joe laughed, as he looked at Wayne's puzzled face. "Oh, Bob will get into politics fast enough, Tim," he said. "He just thinks he won't. You see, he hasn't been a Hoosier long enough to become acclimated yet. He's from the South."

"Well, I assure you that I intend being a loyal Hoosier, anyway," responded the preacher. "And if politics is a necessity I'll face the issue."

Craig fitted the red-hot shoe, and the smell of burning hoof arose. He inspected it carefully before replying.

"Now you're talking. And the issue this fall will be the same thing it was four years ago —

gold standard against free silver. McKinley's sure to be renominated, and Byran's just as sure to be named. That don't leave — whoa! — any middle ground. Jap Munson and I locked horns proper the other day, and dinged if I don't believe half the town crowded around to hear us argue. Jap galloped back to '73 and — stand still, what's the matter with you? — brought up the Crime, and for about half an hour there was more free silver and aristocratic gold laying around here than there ever was before. Oh, she's goin' — whoa! — to be a warm one, Parson." The hammer beat a rat-a-tat on the shoe as the nails were driven home.

Joe had stepped out on the walk, and was talking with a passing acquaintance, and Wayne decided to begin his investigation at once.

"There are a good many teams in town; I suppose you have been quite busy to-day," he said.

"Just got set down five minutes before you fellows come."

"Shod any strange horses?"

"N-o-o." The answer was hesitating. Wayne looked at him inquiringly.

"Well, there was one bit of work I did that kind o' puzzled me," he said. "I'd swear the horse wasn't a strange one, but a stranger had him."

"But of course that was nothing strange." Wayne's tone was careless, but in it was an insinuation that he would like to hear more.

"No, but the man came to my house before breakfast, and said he was in a tearing hurry to

drive to Riverside, and his horse had lost a shoe. So I came down to the shop to do the work." He was back at the bellows again, working the handle with long sweeps. "The horse was a fine-looking gray, and looked familiar to me. I asked him if he owned the animal, and he spoke right up and said that he had hired it in Riverside to drive down into the country to visit some Dunkard friends. He was dressed like a Dunkard, himself. Well, I took up the horse's foot, and I'll be dinged if I wasn't surprised then. That hoof was broken in a most peculiar manner. About two inches right in front had been torn off clear in to the flesh. There was the puzzle. Jim Gordon, out here in the country, owns a horse just like that, gray, and with the same hoof torn in the same way. I doctored the foot when it was first hurt, and I've shod it several times since."

"A queer coincidence, truly."

"I should say so. I mentioned it to the fellow, and he jumped like he was shot, and ripped out a big cuss word. Said he hadn't noticed it before, and then muttered something about 'damn fool,' meaning the liveryman, I suppose. But I tell you, Parson, that was queer talk for a Dunkard."

"You're right, it was. But all men do not live up to their clothes." Then, as if attempting a joke, he added: "And did the man limp as if he also had a bad foot?"

The hammer was playing on the red-hot shoe, beating it into the proper shape, and occasionally

making the anvil ring while the smith turned the shoe.

"No, he walked as straight as a string, even if he did talk crooked."

"By himself?"

"Yes, by himself in a single buggy."

"Come on, Wayne, let's go up-town," said Joe, from the doorway. "Be back after the horses this evening," he called to Tim, as the two started away.

It was near the middle of the afternoon, and some of the farmers were already homeward bound, their vehicles laden with bundles. With the instinct of every true Southerner, Wayne noted with admiration the horses. Occasionally would be seen a scrawny animal, with harness tied together with ropes and strings, but, as a rule, they were sleek, well-fed beasts, full of life, and wearing harness that fit and was serviceable. Farm-wagons were plentiful, but he was surprised to see several family carriages also, while occasionally a rubber-tired buggy whizzed by with some young swain and his sweetheart laughing and calling gaily to those whom they passed on the road. They turned the corner of the "L" and were on Main Street.

"Craigville's Broadway," said Joe, with a laugh.

A crowd of small boys had preëmpted a goodly portion of a graveled walk for a game of marbles, and were shouting to each other in a manner that indicated deafness on the part of all. Out in the street two or three older boys were practising

throwing curves with a baseball. The stores were doing a rushing business, the clerks and the customers joking good-naturedly with each other and discussing the coming crop. "Bill" and "John" and "Sam" were more frequently heard than "Mister." Dunkards were numerous, the men in their broad felt hats, queer-cut jean coat and trousers, and the women in plain gowns and bonnets. But from their clear eyes shone souls of purity; lives of righteousness were reflected in their faces. They were the only ones who refrained from talking politics. A Dunkard will discuss religion by the hour, but wild horses could not drag him into a political discussion.

Wayne had supposed that Joe would head straight for the post-office, but he did not. Instead, he attended to various other affairs at different stores, and at last the preacher concluded that the young man did not particularly care for company while at the office. Perhaps he could get the mail and purchase Jap Munson's stamps of Bess Craig much better if a third party were not present.

"Joe, you attend to your business matters, and I'll knock around a little by myself. I like to study these people," he said.

"Why, of course. That's a good idea. I'll see you along here some place after awhile." His tone betrayed an eagerness that brought a smile to the preacher's lips.

He strolled down the street aimlessly, enjoying his first taste of Indiana village life. Half a dozen

boys and men were pitching horseshoes, a substitute for quoits, in an open space between two buildings. Across the street was the Tyler House, and in front was a crowd, jammed together and tiptoeing to see the central figures. The loafers on the bench stood up on the seat to see. Occasionally a "haw-haw" of laughter and a half-cheer arose. As he was sightseeing, Wayne yielded to curiosity and crossed the street. Edging his way into the crowd, he tiptoed with the rest and caught fragments of an excited speaker's words: "... dastardly crime of '73 . . . silver degraded. . . ." The voice was certainly familiar, but Wayne was unable to decide as to the speaker's identity. The other man came in with his reply, fragmentary as caught by the preacher: "... dollar that can travel around the world and be respected . . . we'll expand and take our place . . . nations of the world." A hum of applause, and then: "... plutocracy . . . emperor . . . haul down the flag . . . dollar of our dads . . . answer me; answer me!" Then he knew. Jap Munson was in the centre of that group "locking horns," as Timothy Craig had expressed it, with some Republican. No other man could demand an answer in quite the triumphant tone of voice affected by Munson. Instinctively he listened for the crack of his black-snake, but he realized that the quarters were too close for a man of even Munson's proficiency.

He had about decided to leave the saving of the country to the two orators and their numerous

interested auditors, when a sudden scuffle almost behind him attracted his attention. Quickly turning, he saw a tall young man holding another man by the collar and dragging him out of the crowd. He followed the couple, but most of those who had heard the scuffle preferred a political argument to a fight, so they soon stood comparatively alone.

"Hand over my watch, you dirty thief!" exclaimed the captor.

"I no take your watch, Meester; I no take it."

The reply was a whining plea for innocence, and, as Wayne got a full look at the cringing fellow, he recognized him as a type of that mysterious nomad, the gypsy. His swarthy face was pallid with fear, and he half-crouched, clinging to the arm that held him, his battered felt hat clutched in one hand.

"You lie, you dog; hand it over, or I'll tear you to pieces!" And the speaker shook him as a dog would a rat.

A howl of terror and a volume of jargon mixed with a little English, "I no do eet! I no do eet!" was the only response.

"What's the matter, Jim?" asked a bystander.

"Simply that, while I was in the crowd, this lizard of the earth jammed against me and stole my watch. Damn him!" In a sudden burst of rage, he dealt the cringing wretch a blow with his open hand that staggered him and would have sent him to the ground had not the arm of his assailant held him.

"The coward!" muttered Wayne, biting his lips.

"O-h-h! Maircy, Meester. I no take yer watch. Sairch me. By the blessed Virgin, I no —"

The protest was stopped by another heavy blow full on the mouth, cutting the man's lips on his teeth and causing the blood to flow.

The preacher could stand idly by no longer. Fairly choking with indignation, he sprang forward and seized the gypsy's assailant by the collar, and with the other hand broke his grasp on the cowering wanderer. With the strength of a sudden rage, he flung the man back, causing him to stagger and then fall sprawling on the walk.

"You brute!" he exclaimed. "Have you no mercy?"

The man scrambled to his feet, his face livid with fury, and would have rushed at the preacher had not some of his friends caught him. A crowd had quickly gathered. The gypsy would have darted away, but the hotel was at their back and a semi-circle of unfriendly faces surrounded him and his rescuer, so he crept closer to Wayne, repeating over and over: "I no do eet, I no do eet, Meester."

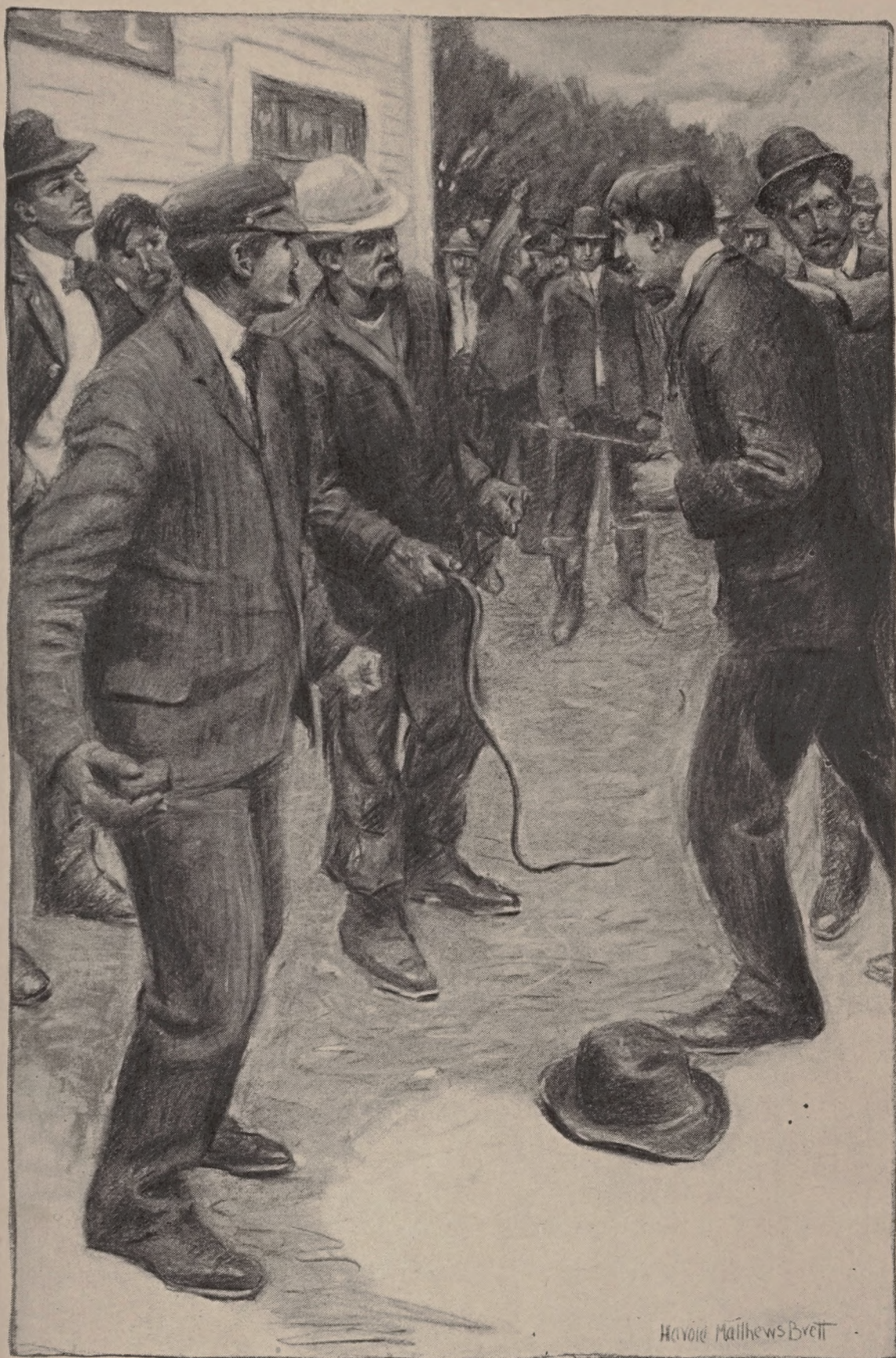
Wayne saw at a glance that the crowd was in sympathy with the one whom he had upset; those who had caught the man as he rose to his feet were now being urged by those near by to release him, and the preacher caught the words, "tar and feathers," . . . "fix 'em both," . . . "part of gang that'll rob our houses to-night." Wayne saw no friendly faces, and, well knowing that his im-

pulsive act of befriending one of the despised gypsies was likely to cause him serious trouble, he slowly edged back toward the hotel. That the crowd considered him a vicious character, he had no doubt, and, if it attacked him, he wanted to be sure that all enemies would be in front.

Curses and gibes came from the crowd, but it had just witnessed an exhibition of the stranger's splendid strength, and, as he stood there, head erect, his clenched fists resting on his hips, and scorn blazing from his eyes, no one was anxious to be first to lay hands on him. Only a moment had elapsed, and then from out of the semicircle a big stone came flying. Wayne ducked, and the missile went crashing through a window of the hotel. A chunk of dirt followed, and was better aimed, striking Wayne on the shoulder, and bringing a gasp from the gypsy and a shout of approval from the mob, for such it now was.

At that moment, a little man with red hair and a broad-rimmed straw hat broke through the cordon and sprang to the side of the preacher. In his hand he carried a blacksnake whip. It was Jap Munson. As he turned to face the crowd, one more venturesome than the rest stepped forward a few paces and stooped to pick up a stone. Like a flash the long leathern lash shot out from Munson's hand, and with a cry of pain the man staggered back, a great blood-red welt showing across the back of his hand.

"Thanks, Munson," said Wayne, turning a look



IN HIS HAND HE CARRIED A BLACKSNAKE WHIP.— *Page 94.*

of appreciation on the little man, and feeling a genuine admiration for the skill displayed.

"Don't mention it, Parson, don't mention it — at least until we get out of here."

They were now surrounded by the mob, and no way of escape was open except through the window of the hotel at their back, and they felt that this was impracticable. The mob lacked a leader, and contented itself with shouting imprecations and occasionally showering gravel and dirt on them. The man whom Wayne had thrown was now talking excitedly with a man in blue clothes who wore a marshal's badge. He pointed frequently to the gypsy, who still cowered back of Wayne, but the yells and howls were so loud that the words could not be heard. Munson stepped forward slightly, and held up his left hand for silence, but discreetly kept the whip clutched ready for use in his right. The howls died to a murmur.

"Look here, you fellows," began Munson. "There's no call for all this. This here gent is a friend of mine, and I calculate to back him up with this blacksnake, which pops like a pistol and bites like the devil. You hear me; you hear *me*? It bites like the devil!" He paused a moment to note the effect of his words, and gave the whip a flourish by way of emphasis. There was no reply, and he continued:

"That gent there, Jim Gordon (Wayne started with surprise at the name), accuses this gypsy of stealing his watch. He forgets himself and strikes

the little cuss a couple of times, and my friend here interferes. But, men of Tyler County, he is not trying to shield the gypsy. All he wants is a little less brutality and more law. (Wayne nodded.) Now, then, there's Bill Ward, as good a marshal as ever wore a star (Wayne's opinion of Munson as a shrewd politician rose); let him search the Dago. Ain't that fair?"

"Sure thing, Jap; you're right!"

"That's the proper ticket."

These and other shouts arose, and the tide of violence was stayed. A crowd is frequently moved to violence by trivial things, but, even in its blind fury, a few words of reason often cool its blood.

"All right, Bill; come and do your duty," and Jap stuffed his hands in his pockets, having tucked his whip under his arm as a token of peace.

The marshal strode forward, and the crowd began to press closer, but Munson coiled his whip in his hand and waved them back.

"Give the law a clear field and plenty of room, gentlemen," he said, and they obeyed meekly. Somehow he seemed to have grown in stature, and, with his red hair bristling, he impressed the preacher as being a born leader.

"Stand up, Dago," said the limb of the law, laying his hand on the gypsy's shoulder, and the nomad obeyed, still protesting that he "no do eet."

Ward proved to be thoroughly proficient in the searching business, and Wayne could not help thinking that if the gypsy had a secret in his heart the

officer would surely find it, so thorough was his inspection. But no watch was to be found.

"No use talking, boys," he said, shaking his head, "there ain't no watch concealed on this chap."

"Then, sir," said Wayne, "I would like to ask the gentleman" (nodding toward Gordon, who stood sullenly by) "if he is quite sure he had his watch with him."

"Of course, I'm sure, and it's gone now."

"Have you examined all of your pockets?"

"Yes, I have. The watch was in my upper vest pocket here, and now it's —" (a queer expression came over his face as he slapped his side) "it's gone. But I guess I'll be going," and he turned hastily, as if to leave, but Wayne interfered. He had noted the look of embarrassment and had suspected its cause.

"Wait a minute. We are all interested in that watch now, and, as strange mistakes sometimes happen, I suggest that the marshal assist you in examining your clothes. It is a favor I am sure he will accord you." He glanced at Ward, and that officer nodded with a sly wink. He clearly understood Wayne's suspicions and evidently sympathized with them.

"Why, sure, Jim, let me help you." He stepped forward, and Gordon, unable to withdraw, submitted. The marshal made a few rapid passes and then exclaimed:

"Well, here's a lump that feels to me like a watch, Jim."

Gordon's face was red, and his words came hesitatingly: "Well, I would — have sworn I searched — every pocket."

"Probably you did, but this is back in the lining. Guess the ticker slipped through a hole in your pocket. Let's see. Sure, look at that!" He deftly turned the pocket inside out and displayed a hole in its bottom. "Now for the watch. Ah, there you are!" The lost timepiece was pushed up through the hole and handed to Gordon, who received it without a word.

The gypsy beamed with joy, and would have embraced Wayne had the latter not declined such a proceeding.

"I no forget you, Meester," he said. Then his eyes suddenly darkened, and he turned toward Gordon and pointed one gaunt, yellow finger at him menacingly, and hissed: "An' I no forget you!"

In a moment he plunged into the crowd and was gone. Gordon turned his back and walked away, and the crowd dispersed also.

"Munson, I insist on extending my thanks to you. I have sense enough to know that my little adventure might have been serious if you hadn't sided with me. A crowd is the most unreasonable thing on earth. A bauble that a fool would scoff at will sometimes goad a crowd of sane men to reckless things."

Munson sat down on the deserted bench by the hotel and fanned himself with his hat.

"You're about right, Parson," he said, slowly,

as though his mind were on other things. "But you spoiled one of the hottest arguments of the summer. I had that Republican right where I wanted him. I'd 'a' made some votes there if you hadn't snatched Jim Gordon." He stretched out his legs, then suddenly leaned back and went into a paroxysm of laughter. "Derned if that wasn't a good toss you give him, though. I caught a glimpse of him sailing toward the walk just like a frog. Ha! ha! ha! I guess you're my kind of a parson. Let me feel your muscle." He gripped Wayne's generous biceps and nodded approval.

"Jap Munson, you old sinner!" exclaimed a voice, and they saw Joe standing before them. "Thought you were not coming to town; thought you were going to Bundy's Ford."

"Now, Joe, be easy. I started for the Ford, but I got to thinking what bully political arguments would be scattered around Craigville to-day, and so I just drove over for a bit. But I'm in an awful rush, Joe, and am hurrying for my wagon right now. Yes, sir, I was just rushing for the wagon when I stopped to talk to the Parson a minute. I'm going now." He jumped up and strode rapidly down the street a short distance, and then turned and shouted back: "Get my mail, will you, Joey? I'm in such a rush I haven't time."

His team was tied at the town rack near by. Hastily he untied the halter-strap, sprang into the wagon, and with many exclamations backed out of

the crowd of vehicles. Then his whip circled and cracked, and, with a final wave of his hand, he drove away at a sweeping trot, standing up behind the seat, and reminding the preacher in a ludicrous way of a Roman charioteer.

"Well, are you ready to go home?" asked Joe.

Wayne was silent a moment. He was thinking of Jim Gordon and what the reporter had told him concerning the young farmer. He knew now that Gordon was not worthy the love of such a woman, and he was rather surprised to find that the discovery gave him a certain kind of pleasure. "But," he soliloquized, "what am I going to do about it?" He glanced down at his clothes, and again the realization came to him that they were poor and cheap. Clothes do not make the man, but they are a powerful lever in the affairs of men. Jim Gordon probably had a Sunday suit, he thought, and he knew that it was hard for the world to see beyond a coat. His own looked more shabby than ever.

"I want to get some new clothes first," he replied.

Joe looked at him, but did not speak. He appeared embarrassed, and swung one foot back and forth under the bench. Wayne understood.

"I have a small sum of money," he said.

They arose and walked across the street, both silent. Joe stepped to a counter and scribbled on a piece of paper, and then handed it to Wayne.

"A foot-log over the shoals," he said, simply. It was a check for fifty dollars.

Wayne felt the lump rise in his throat, and he turned hastily away for a moment and wiped something warm and moist from his eyes. Then he wheeled and his hand sought the hand of his friend and held it in a clinging clasp. When he withdrew his hand, he left the check in Joe's palm.

"God bless you, Joe. But don't rob me of my independence, just yet. Some day — perhaps."

They found Timothy Craig enjoying another "breathing spell" when they returned to the shop. The slip of paper was spread out on his knee again.

"Dinged if I have located them treasure-hunters yet, Parson," he called as they came up.

"Neither have I, — but I intend to," responded Wayne.

They drove homeward in the glory of the evening. From the summit of a gentle rise Wayne looked back and saw the village bathed in the mellow beauty of the fast setting sun. Fields of waving corn, breast high, bordered the road, a panorama of waving green, marked sharply with the white stretch of graveled roadway. The way led through a narrow strip of woodlands, and a rickety rail fence, a decaying memory of the past, zig-zagged a border between the timber and the corn.

"Whoa!"

Joe pulled sharply on the lines, and then, noting his companion's look of inquiry, pointed to the rail fence.

"It's a poem to me," he said; "a song of yesterday. The rail fences are fast disappearing, and in their passing they are taking my boyhood. Indiana boasts of her progress; I weep at her ruthless changes. To me there is more sentiment in one mossy rail of that fence than in all the wire that was ever strung on posts." He twitched the lines and they drove on.

A pretty farmhouse shaded by two giant oaks was passed. The farmer and his family sat under one of the trees enjoying the deliciousness of the June-time. The man was playing an accordion, and the preacher's eyes glistened as he caught the strains:

"Way down upon the Suwanee River."

Across the fields came the lowing of cattle, and they heard the merry shouts of the farm-hands, as they came riding in from the fields astride the plodding work-horses, with trace-chains jingling. When they reached home, they found Lorraine waiting to swing open the barn-yard gate for them.

"Take the bundles to the house, Bob, and I'll put up the horses," said Joe, and, with half a protest, Wayne sprang from the buggy and began pulling out the packages.

"And I'll help Mr. Wayne," said Lorraine, with a laugh.

They stood on the porch a moment, awaiting a call to supper. The sun was resting in the tree-tops in the west. She spoke of the glory of the sunset, which had thrown a bar of gold at their

feet, and referred to the rays as "Sol's children," which he seemed to be trying to recall before retiring for the night.

"Then Sol will wait in vain," was his reply.

"Why?"

"Because some of his children have found a more glorious retreat. I see the truants hiding in your hair."

A soft color stole to her cheeks.

"Your Southern ancestry again," she said.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SERMON

THE service had been set for afternoon, in order to better accommodate the country folk who had a few miles to drive.

Sunday morning after breakfast Wayne donned his new clothes, and, clean shaven, was not displeased with the picture the mirror gave him. He smiled as he thought of the scorn that once would have surged over him at the suggestion that he would wear a suit of ready-made clothing. But nature had kindly met the tailor half-way, and, as a result, his splendid physique appeared to fairly good advantage in the suit of plain black.

"Best looking suit I ever saw come out of a Craigville store," whispered Joe, approvingly, as they met.

Wayne began to feel a little nervous. Suppose he should make a failure of the service! He had always been strong in extemporaneous work, but he began to wish that he had prepared and committed a sermon. True, it was only an humble country church, and the congregation would not be overly critical, yet he was anxious to win the

approval of the congregation, he told himself. Yes, he told himself this, but he knew that it was untrue. What, then, was the cause of his nervousness? He searched his brain, but the answer was not there. He probed his heart and found the truth, though the probing cost him pain.

He asked to be permitted to spend the morning alone, and his request was voted proper. He crossed the meadows where daisies and buttercups were bathing in the sunbeams. The breath of the clover sweetened the air, but, as he paused to drink it in, he brushed against a thistle. "The Jim Gordon of the meadow," he said, thrusting it aside with his foot. He skirted the edge of the woods and came to the foot-log over Willow Creek. Then a sudden inspiration came to him, and he plunged once more into the woods and turned in the direction taken by the mysterious men with the pick and spade. A brisk walk soon brought him to the spot where the horse had been left by the men. He could see plainly where the grass had been trampled by the horse and crushed by the wheels of the buggy. Bending closer, he examined the ground carefully, and at last an exclamation of satisfaction escaped him. He had found a spot where the ground was bare. A recent rain had left it moist and the thick branches had kept the sun from drying it out. Plainly stamped thereon was the print of a horse's hoof, and the dent was clear cut except a short space in front, indicating that the hoof that had made the print was defective.

"Lost anything?"

The voice startled him, and, as he sprang to his feet, he saw Jim Gordon leaning over the gate and regarding him with a black look.

"No, I've found something," he replied.

"What is it, the trail of a gypsy?" There was a broad sneer in his tone.

"Perhaps. I haven't been quite able to classify him yet. It is a trail, and it may have been a gypsy, but he was disguised as a Dunkard."

Gordon sprang over the gate and walked up to Wayne, who stood coolly regarding him without changing his attitude.

"Look here," said Gordon, in a snarling tone, "I hear that you've gone to work for Wilson, but let me tell you that you are too damned fresh. Stick to your plough and don't try any Sherlock Holmes business, and you'll be happier."

"On the contrary, I am quite happy over my discoveries. Shall I tell you some of them?" He had resolved to put on a bold front and trust to luck to make plausible deductions hit somewhere near the truth.

Gordon was naturally a good-looking young man, but the hate engendered in the conflict in Craigville was being augmented by the tantalizingly cool, insinuating tones now used by Wayne, and passion had drawn a cruel look about his mouth and eyes.

"I don't mind; I have a few minutes to spare," he replied, sarcastically, sitting down on a stump.

"Well, we'll have to omit the chills and fever

music of the melodrama, and bring the villain on the stage with a rush. Never mind his personal description — except that he limps.” Gordon’s eyes half-closed as he gazed at the speaker. “The chief villain calls another to his aid, and they plot in stage whispers. An electric line is the basis for the plot, but an additional plot works in, the last one dealing with a fine Indiana farm. Then they decide that a local agent is necessary, and they induce a young man of the neighborhood to join them. The first two villains go on a midnight expedition with a buggy, a spade, and a pick. The horse and buggy are borrowed from the local conspirator, and the horse has a defective hoof that leaves a plain trail that — ”

“You lie!” Gordon sprang from the stump, his body quivering with rage.

“What do *you* know about it, Jim Gordon?”

“I know that this is an unhealthy neighborhood for sneaks like you. I know that unless you are out of Tyler County within forty-eight hours, something will happen to you.” In his rage he threw discretion to the winds and hurled the threats with venomous vigor.

“So, it is a declaration of war, is it? So be it, then. But listen to the tongue of a prophet: When I leave Tyler County for good, a wrong will have been righted and other wrongs will have been prevented. I shall remain here.”

“And I suppose you have been filling the ears of the Wilsons with your infernal lies?”

"I have told them nothing, and I shall not tell them — yet."

Gordon looked at him sullenly a moment, and then turned toward the road. After a few steps, he faced about.

"Forty-eight hours! Remember!"

Wayne smiled contemptuously. "Yesterday I threw a viper into the dust. This morning I found a thistle in my path. I named it Jim Gordon and brushed it aside with my foot. When next I find that thistle in my path, I shall crush it." He turned and walked back through the woods.

The little frame church in the walnut grove at the crossroads was rapidly filling with people. The plain pine benches with a single strip for a back had been dusted and arranged with an aisle in the centre, and on a slightly raised platform in front the pulpit stood, an oblong box on end, with the top sawed bias so as to make a tilt for the Bible. The farmers and their families sat together, and, as they entered, there was much bowing and smiling across the room to acquaintances. Through an open window the butterflies came flitting, and occasionally a serious-looking bumblebee darted in and buzzed hither and thither, causing many to duck their heads. Sturdy farmer boys drove up to the church and handed bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked sweethearts from their buggies, and left them standing chatting with girl friends while they drove into the shade of the grove and hitched, sticking

a small leafy branch here and there in the harness to act as a "shoo-fly," as it was called in the local parlance.

Wayne arrived late. He felt that to stand idly about, while waiting for the hour for service to begin, would render him more nervous than he already was. He walked across the fields with Joe, and was pleased to find the church almost filled when he arrived. The Major and Mrs. Wilson were waiting for them under a tree at the church door, and shook hands with him. They stood silent a moment.

"I am ready," said Wayne, and the three stepped within, leaving Joe standing at the door.

Mrs. Wilson's hand rested lightly on the preacher's arm as they passed down the aisle, and a silent prayer arose that he might prove worthy the confidence the mother had placed in him. In the brief steps he renewed his vow to lighten the burdens that he felt were resting on the silvered heads beside him.

He had asked that he be given no introduction save that which he should give himself. So the Major and his wife stopped near the front and took a seat, permitting him to pass on to the rostrum alone. A hush had fallen. He felt the gaze of the assemblage upon him as he took the pulpit seat. Then he raised his eyes and was face to face with his congregation. He had felt their gaze, but their bearing was respectful. He heard a commotion near the door as a late arrival entered, and

he saw Timothy Craig enter, leading an elderly lady, while close behind him came Joe by the side of a pretty dark-haired girl with a rose bloom in her cheeks. He rightly guessed that it was the mother and Bess. Near the aisle Lorraine sat with Paragraph and Susanna, the latter, a slim wisp of a girl, stealing shy glances at the trim-built, nattily dressed swain at her side, who devoted his time to smiling at Wayne and nodding him encouragement.

The hour for beginning had arrived. Through an open window came the trill of a wren and the piping of a robin. He thought of Lorraine's words, "Your choir is practising." He arose, and, with a fleeting glance toward Lorraine, said that Nature had kindly furnished a choir of feathered songsters, and that as they had begun their carols he felt that the moment had arrived to take up his work. They caught the significance, and he saw that the odd conceit pleased them. Then he announced a hymn, and as he led it with his full baritone voice he saw the eyes of Mrs. Wilson beam with pleasure.

"Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly."

The grand old song was sung with fervor, and there was no shortage of bassos. He asked that some one in the congregation would offer prayer, and a patriarch on a bench back near the door responded with a supplication that was clear-cut, with-

out a whine of hypocrisy or a whimper of strained pathos.

There was a pause, and Wayne stood before them, nervously fingering the leaves of a Bible a moment, and then he began to speak. He told them that he was there a stranger, hoping for acquaintanceship and confidence, which he would endeavor to merit. He told them that he had left the whisper of the Suwanee to harken to the murmur of the Wabash; he had come among them to be one of them, to labor as they labored; if he had at any time in the past been a drone, he wished the future to afford him opportunity to rectify the record. Though fortune had granted him a theological diploma, he had no excuses to offer for having cast off creed.

✓ “God created you and me equally intelligent, on the average. At least, I can find no place in His word where He authorizes me to forbid you this or that on my own authority; the Book contains His commandments. Nor can I find where He says that you and I shall band ourselves together and in His name formulate laws for the salvation of man. Such laws are fallible. I see the towering steeple of a magnificent edifice on one corner, and in that church a minister, intrenched behind a creed adopted by some convention of men, offers salvation according to the plan adopted by these sages, — godly men, no doubt, but men, nevertheless. Across on another corner the sun gilds the stained-glass windows of another palace of gospel, — gos-

pel according to the deliberations of a conference of learned men, — righteous, clean-lived men, but, withal, men. And one declares that a certain thing is black and the other declares that it is white, while down the street I hear the chiming bell of a church whose pastor, by the authority of the fathers of his creed, declares that it is of chameleon hue, — either white or black, according to the light. Then I turn to the Book and I read God's message on the subject. If the precise, literal meaning of the text is obscure, my opinion on the subject may be of interest and profit to you, but flesh and blood and brain are fallible, and I deny that the opinions of man shall be binding when it comes to questions of our souls' welfare. 'He that hath eyes to see let him see, he that hath ears to hear let him hear.' The Book is filled with the riches of a glorious Christ message, on which all men who acknowledge their Savior can agree. If there are obscure passages, let us decide them as they appear to us, and if questions of the affairs of the world confront us and the question arises in our minds, 'Is it in opposition to God's will?' let each of us settle those questions according to our conscience. A man may, with propriety, declare his *belief* that the commission of these acts in question is an offense unto the Lord, but no man hath the right to declare it to be a fact, for in this twilight of the nineteenth century many questions arise in our daily lives that the Bible does not treat with directly. Conscience alone can guide. God hath not spoken to man

direct since the birth of the creeds. Yet I come not among you to battle with the creed of any man. If your plan of life harmonizes with your conscience and your investigation, cling to it, if it has God for its central figure."

He chose another hymn, and it was sung with a will. Then he announced his text, "And when ye stand praying, forgive," Mark 11:25. He unpinned a great red rose from his coat lapel and held it before him, saying that the flower, one of the fairest of God's works, fittingly illustrated the plea he wished to present. It represented the life of the innocent with the evil hovering near. Outwardly it was fair to look upon; it appealed to the eye with its beauty; it wooed the heart and brain with its God-given fragrance; and yet, when the unwary reached out to pluck it, to clasp it to the bosom, a wound was made by the thorn concealed just behind the inviting beauty of the blushing petal. So it was with life, he declared. A pleasure is offered in good faith, and the donor goes his way, only to find, later, that he has bestowed a thorn. A pleasure is sought, and in its glorious beauty is clasped to the heart, but, while the fragrance of the petal is steeping the senses, the terrible sting of the thorn pierces the heart, and the deadly thing is flung from the sufferer; but too late, a scar remains. ✓ ✓

He had felt a diffidence at first, and his words had come haltingly as he groped his way forward in his subject. His thought was clearly outlined in his mind, but he felt the presence of his hearers

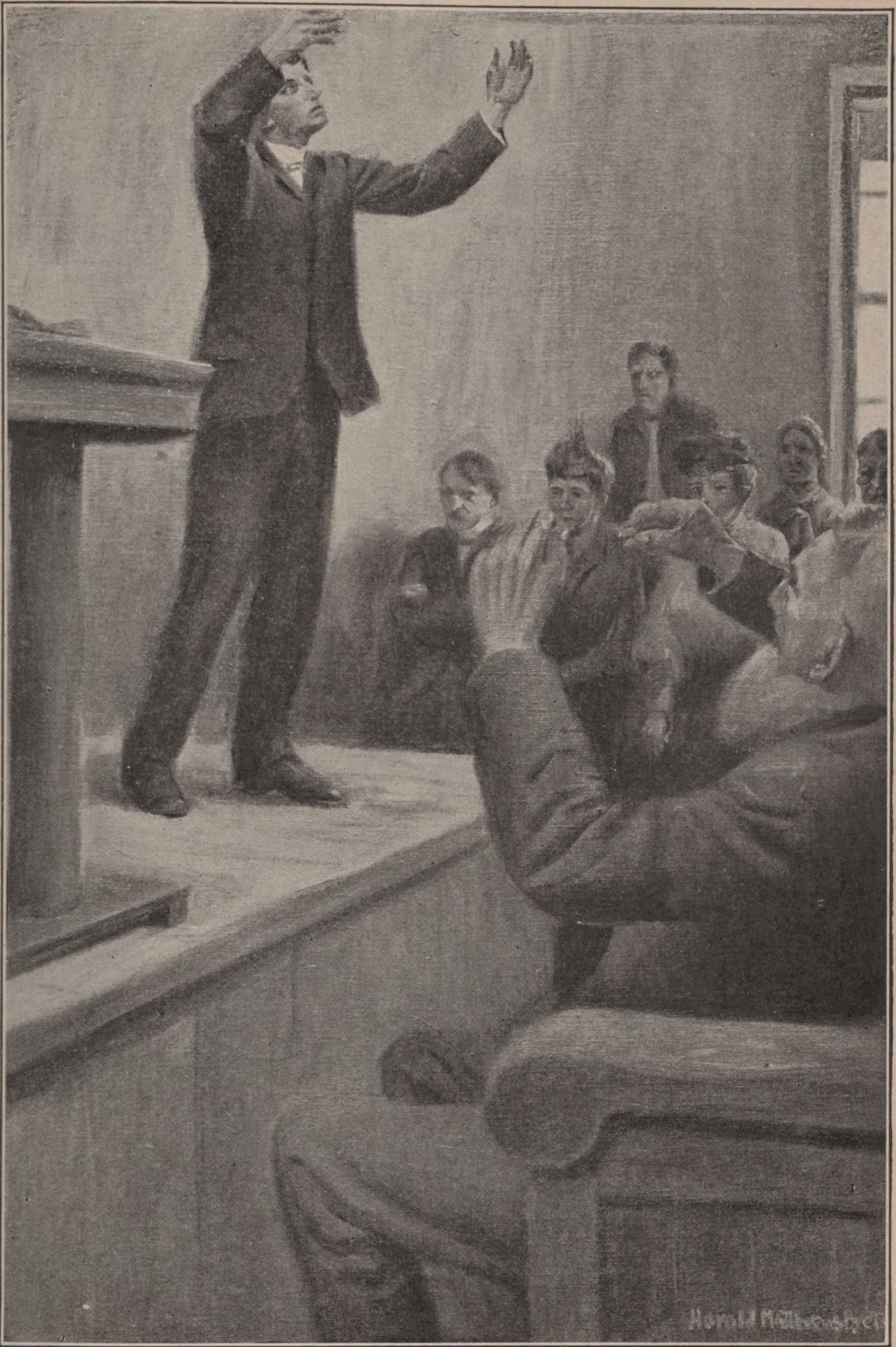
and the glance of a pair of eyes whose depths treasured the violet's blue, and he wondered as he stumbled through the sentences if those eyes bore reproach, or sorrow, or disappointment at his failure. For he felt that he was failing. He dared not trust himself to meet that gaze, for, if disappointment should be mirrored there, he knew that he should become dumb and rush from the pulpit in an agony of shame.

In a far corner sat a grim, hard-visaged man. In the lines of his face harshness was written, and in his general demeanor a sneer was flaunted. Wayne now resolutely turned toward him. He felt that he was already condemned as a dolt in the estimation of that man, and the feeling brought a certain sense of self-possession and aroused his combativeness. He could meet an enemy and fight skillfully and well, whereas trusting hopefulness unnerved him by its demands. He began to preach to the man in the corner. He told a story, eloquent in its simplicity, of a girl, radiantly fair and pure as the dewdrop on the petal of a rose, whose every footstep was in the refulgent beauty of a love and praise for God. In graphic words he told of the day when Fate had tolled the hour that marked a turning-point in her life. The man was handsome, he said, and possessed of courtly grace, and the story was as old as time. In her heart there sounded the swelling music that responded to the hand of Youth as it swept the lyre of Hope. The rose was so beautiful, so fragrant with joy, that

she stretched out her fair, white hands for it and clasped it to her bosom. The rose was Love. Standing at the altar, she gave her spotless life into the hands of the handsome one with courtly graces, but she consented to keep the nuptials secret for a time, until the man could make certain arrangements. Then there came an hour when she awoke to find that her life of spotless purity had been placed in soiled hands, and that the courtly graces were practised wiles, deadly as the swaying head and glittering eyes of the serpent weaving its charm about its victim. Then there was a cry of anguish, for the rose she had pressed to her heart had dropped its petals, and the great, cruel thorn, artfully concealed, had pierced her soul. Sobbing and struggling in her agony of mind and soul, she flung the once beautiful flower, now a hideous nettle, from her and trampled it into the dust. But it was too late; the thorn had triumphed over the petal. He pictured her dishonored, fleeing from the presence of her acquaintances, desperate, broken-hearted, ashamed. And ashamed of what? Of that which had seared her life and left her a scar. Yet her only wrong was that she had, in the radiance of her dreams, pressed to her heart the rose. She knew not of the thorn; surely there was forgiveness. And the man who had joined their hands, the man who had invoked the authority of God in handing her the rose, what of him? The speaker's head was thrown back, he had stepped away from the pulpit, and his arms were

uplifted, as though imploring the judgment of heaven. What of this man who had, in the name of God, placed in that woman's hand the thorn that was so grievously to wound? Was there no forgiveness for him?

His manner grew more earnest, his words crowded rapidly one after the other; the halting hesitancy was gone. He forgot that he was a failure, forgot the eyes of blue, forgot the hard-visaged man in the corner, and remembered only that a just God reigned. He felt the fires of a burning eloquence consuming him; he no longer groped for language to clothe his thoughts; he had ceased to think, but the eloquence spurted in fiery geysers from his heart. He pleaded for a broader charity, for a spirit that could emulate Christ. In a few graphic sentences he drew the picture of the Savior on Calvary, how the Son of God had, even in that supreme moment of torture and agony, forgiven those who drove the nails into His flesh and pressed the crown of thorns on His brow. Then he told of a penitent who was scourged by the memory of sins of the past; how an angel in clinging robes of white and with a sceptre of roses had banished the demons, and in a voice like the music of heaven's harp had whispered, "The blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin;" how she had pointed the prostrate penitent to the great Cross that gleamed white before him, and how the penitent had cast himself, sobbing, at its foot, wrap-



HIS ARMS WERE UPLIFTED, AS THOUGH IMPLORING THE JUDGMENT OF HEAVEN. — *Page 116.*

ping his arms about the Cross and clinging to it as a support for life, a refuge for eternity.

The next moment he was on his knees, pouring out an impassioned prayer that the spirit of forgiveness might be instilled into the hearts of men, that men should be ready to pluck the thorn from the heart of the sufferer. He glorified the justice of God and thanked Him for the Cross. A murmur came to his ears, and he paused; a chorus of fervent amens arose, and in a moment he was on his feet, steadying himself with his hand on the Bible. Then he remembered his hearers, and, wiping the perspiration from his brow, he looked about him. Somehow it seemed as though he had come back from an unreal land. Mechanically his eyes sought the hard-visaged man in the corner. The man still sat there, but the lines of his face were softened, and his handkerchief went frequently to his eyes. Then Wayne looked for the Major. He saw him on his knees, his face buried in his hands, while Mrs. Wilson was crying softly, and alternately wiping her spectacles and resting her hand on the whitened locks of her husband. He stood silent, but some one started a hymn:

“I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love.”

The rose had fallen to the floor. He stooped and picked it up and held it hesitatingly a moment. Then, for the first time, his gaze stole back to where *she* sat. She was leaning forward, her hands

clasped in her lap; the brilliancy of diamonds was in her eyes, and the flush of a strange delight tinged her cheeks. He looked and read the silent, unconscious message; he looked and knew that he had won, that he had turned failure into success; how grand a success he did not yet realize. He looked — and then pinned the rose back on his lapel. The hymn was ended. A hush followed.

“The service is at an end,” he said, simply, and turned to take up his hat. Then he found himself surrounded by those who vied with each other in their congratulations. A hundred hands were outstretched to clasp his, as he made his way toward the door.

The churchyard became a place of general assembly, and neighborhood news was exchanged while points of the service were discussed. Jap Munson plucked a man off to one side and dangled the crime of '73 before his horrified eyes, and proved that the township's salvation lay in the coming trustee, and he announced that he was the coming man, that he was loping along in the lead, noting signs of coming woe. He had observed the Sabbath by leaving his blacksnake at home, but his arm sawed the air with the same flourish used in making the figure “8” with the lash. In a group of women, his wife, a tired-looking woman with streaks of gray in her hair and a roll of squalling infancy in her arms, told the others of some new ailment that little Elihu had contracted, and little

Elihu, tugging at her skirts, puckered up his face and looked mournful for the ladies.

Presently Wayne saw Lorraine and went toward her, but his teeth clicked sharp together as he saw Jim Gordon step up to her. He turned away, hoping to escape observation, but she caught sight of him and called. There was no escape, and he lifted his hat as he approached.

"Congratulations," she said, and he murmured his thanks.

"But how thoughtless of me, forgetting to present you. This is Mr. Gordon, Mr. Wayne."

The preacher's hands crossed themselves behind his back, and his acknowledgment was but a slight bow. Gordon shifted himself uneasily.

"Mr. Gordon and I have met before," said Wayne.

The people were beginning to leave. The hired hand and the daughter of his employer drove away together; the servant girl rode with the family, and was one of them. It was all delightful to Wayne, so much so that he was able to force civil words to his lips in carrying on the conversation with Gordon in the presence of the girl.

Joe had deserted him for the blacksmith's sister, and Lorraine laughingly said that Paragraph and Susanna had intimated that three was a little too many for their buggy, and had been told to drive on and she would find another conveyance.

"I would be pleased to set you down at your

gate. I have my buggy here." Gordon's tone was eager. Wayne felt a desire to kick him.

"And you, Mr. Wayne?" asked the girl.

"Oh, I'll walk. I like it." He lifted his hat once more and was turning away when she stopped him.

"I think the walk will be fine. I shall invite myself to take that route, also. Mr. Gordon, I'll not ride to-day."

The fields looked brighter as they walked homeward together. The Johnny-jump-ups rioted in greater profusion than ever. They walked awhile in silence. Then she spoke.

"It was so grand," she said, and he understood, and thanked God once more for his success.

They crossed Willow Creek on the foot-log, and paused a moment to watch the waters swirling about the willows bending low to the water's bosom. They talked of the service and of the social pleasures at its conclusion. The sun was getting low, and a sudden shadow fell. Glancing up, Wayne saw that the sky had become overcast with darkening clouds. One of those June storms for which Indiana is noted was rolling up from the southwest. A gust of wind moaned through the woods; it grew to a gale, and the tree-tops were tossed wildly by the sudden tempest. A half-rotten limb was broken off and sent hurtling through space. Wayne saw it coming directly toward the girl, and sprang forward. Throwing out one arm, he received the blow on the wrist, as a cry of alarm escaped her.

An excruciating pain shot to his shoulder and his face grew white, but he choked back the sound that rose to his lips. His arm fell to his side and a strange numbness came over it. She said something, but the gale stole the words, though he caught the anxiety in the tone. He shook his head, and they hastened their steps. Thunder had been muttering and growling in the distance, and now a vivid flash of lightning rent the heavy blue-black cloud-mass, and a deafening crash of thunder followed instantly. Leaves and twigs swirled about them, as if in a mad dance to the piping of the rising storm. A few rain-drops pattered through the swaying trees, steadily increasing. The girl touched him on the arm and pointed to a log hut near at hand, a hut that was used as a sugar camp in the spring when the maple-trees were yielding their sap. They ran to the hut, and scarcely had they reached it when the storm broke in all its fury. There was no door to the hut, and great cracks gaped between the logs. The rain came down in torrents, and the wind flung it in at the doorway and cracks. There was a flash that blinded them, and a crash that shook the crazy structure that sheltered them, and brought a suppressed scream from the girl. Dazed and half-blinded, Wayne staggered to the door. Then, as sight returned, he saw, close by, a tree torn and split by the bolt.

“Well, it missed us, anyway,” he said, unable to frame a sentence more cheerful.

The cabin had no floor, save the ground, and a great pile of charred chunks lay in the centre where the kettles had hung over the fire during sugar-making season. A board lay close by, but not another thing was in the hut. Little rivulets of water were beginning to trickle across the floor, so Wayne pulled out a couple of the chunks and laid the board across them.

"Not exactly an ark, but we can stand on it and keep our feet dry," he said.

"But how about your arm?" she asked. "Did not that limb hurt you?"

"I thought it was broken at first, but it seems all right now, although a little sore."

"You must know that I am grateful, Mr. Wayne. That limb would have struck me."

He wanted to tell her that she had prepaid the debt by choosing to walk with him rather than to ride with Jim Gordon, but he felt that it would be a presumption. She had evidently chosen to walk for the sake of walking, not for the sake of walking with him. He picked his way to the door and looked out. The flash that had rent the tree seemed to have been the supreme effort of the storm, which was now dying away in the distance, the thunder growling and grumbling farther and farther to the eastward, and the rain lessening. The clouds grew lighter and began to break, but the first shadows of evening were falling. The girl knew the characteristics of Indiana's June-time, and said that the rain would soon cease.

The clouds drifted away, and they picked their way homeward. As they left the hut, Wayne saw a buggy farther back in the woods, and his hands clenched as he recognized it as Jim Gordon's. The girl did not see the buggy, and he hoped that Gordon had not observed them leave the cabin, but he felt that it was a vain hope.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROMOTER

CRAIGVILLE'S doze was broken that week by the gossip concerning the affair between Jim Gordon, the gypsy, and the stranger, who was gradually becoming known as "the Parson." Gordon had many friends in the village, and the hatred for the gypsy bands that preyed on the neighborhood at frequent intervals during the warm months was so intense that public opinion was not very cordial toward the man who had lifted his hand in defense of the despised one.

"Ain't no good goin' to come of backin' up one of them skunks," was the declaration of Sam Sloan, as he whittled another notch in the bench in front of the Tyler House, and the remainder of the self-constituted jury said he was "derved right." In fact, two-thirds of Craigville endorsed his views.

The town marshal, Bill Ward, reminded those who denounced Wayne and the gypsy that Gordon's watch had not been stolen, but they dismissed this fact with a sniff, as if it were of slight consequence. Gypsies were notorious thieves, and if this one hadn't gotten Gordon's watch, it was simply because the watch had slipped down into the lining and could

not be reached. He was undoubtedly in that crowd for no good, and, if Gordon hadn't caught him, he would have robbed some one else. This was the course of reasoning they adopted, and when Sloan said he believed he would run for sheriff on a single-plank, anti-gypsy platform, they applauded him, and the frequenters of the bench predicted that he would make a great race.

Timothy Craig "locked horns" with those who were denouncing Wayne, but he found that it was a strong tide that he was attempting to stem. He gave glowing recitals concerning the new Parson's great sermon at Walnut Grove Church, of how the man had "ripped the scales off a lot of creeds and let God's sunshine reach the Bible," but he realized that it was practically unavailing. Where had the preacher come from? Timothy admitted that he did not know much about it; the Parson had proven such a good fellow that he had forgotten to press that point. All he knew was that it was from some place "down South."

Landlord Hausman, of the Tyler House, listened to the wrangles, but said little. Jacob was a diplomat, if one was ever born, and he knew the value of a discreet tongue. So he shook his fat sides at the sallies of the bench wits, and harkened with grave and reverend demeanor when the bench sages spake. Once, when he was pressed into a position where a declaration on the subject could not be avoided, he very neatly turned his expected avowal into a compromise by a statement that he would

like to know who was going to pay for the window broken by "the boys" during the wrangle with the Parson and the gypsy. As several of the orators felt just a little timid about discussing that point, they did not press Jacob further.

The accommodation from Riverside wheezed up to the little station one morning, and Hausman's eyes beamed as he perceived a passenger alighting. It was not especially uncommon for passengers to drop off at the village, but Hausman could never learn to school the joyful light out of his eyes when such events occurred, and there was not a farmer waiting to whisk the visitor out into the country, and thus spoil business for the hostelry with the historic name.

The stranger was well dressed, with dark hair and carefully trimmed mustache and Van Dyke beard of the same color. His complexion was of a tinge that betokened intimate acquaintance with climes other than that of the North. A handsome man, the world would call him, and so thought Mine Host Hausman, as he stepped to his side and solicited his patronage, yet his warm opinion chilled as he caught a fair look at the eyes that looked at him through a pair of gold-rimmed nose-glasses. The phlegmatic German was not given to comparisons, but he suddenly remembered that the same chill had come to him one day at a circus, when a huge python had fixed its glittering orbs on him through the glass cage. Yes, the stranger wished a hotel. The acknowledgment of his desires was

made in a voice that slurred the consonants and softened the vowels. The landlord seized the stranger's grip and swung off up the street, but in a moment slowed his pace as he detected a slight limp in the guest's walk.

An hour later Jim Gordon entered the hotel office and glanced over the register. "John Ormand" was assigned to room No. 5, the register said, and Gordon, after lounging about until Hausman had left the place temporarily, quickly ran up the stairs and rapped on the door of room No. 5.

"Come," said a voice from within, and Gordon turned the knob and entered. The stranger was lying across the bed, but he arose and yawned indolently as the caller entered.

"Devilish late, aren't you, Gordon?" he drawled, ignoring his visitor's proffered hand, and shoving a chair toward him with his foot.

Gordon noticed the slight, and a tinge of red came to his cheeks. He hesitated a moment, and then took the seat so rudely offered.

"Not very late," he answered, shortly. "Farm work can't be scheduled to the minute like railroad trains. I've been in town half an hour, though."

"Then why on earth didn't you come up?"

"Wouldn't do, that's why. These Hoosiers have sharper eyes and keener minds than you might think. Besides, I had to do a little boosting with the boys. I have become a kind of an issue in Craigville circles. It is Jim Gordon versus the gypsy and —"

"Yes, yes, but never mind village affairs. I really am not interested in Craigville issues." He yawned again, showing a row of very white teeth, with a filling of gold glistening here and there. Then he added, as though an afterthought had come: "That is, unless the issue is an electric line."

The flush showed in Gordon's cheeks again, and he imitated the other's drawl as he replied: "Well, you may become interested in Craigville issues before long."

Ormand smiled. "Very well; I admire spirit, but it isn't what I am paying for at present. You received my letter, of course, else you would not be here."

"Yes."

"And then — you brought what I asked for?"

"No."

Gordon's tone was peculiarly methodical and dry, and the other tugged at his pointed beard in a way that plainly told of his annoyance.

"And why not?" The query was sharp, but Gordon crossed his legs composedly and fanned himself with his hat.

"Guess it wouldn't be worth while to tell you," he said, forcing a yawn.

"Not worth while?" Ormand was staring at him in amazement.

"Don't suppose it would — you're not interested in Craigville issues, you know."

"The devil!"

"No — a preacher."

That Gordon was enjoying his companion's exasperation was evident, and Ormand's swarthy cheeks flamed. He glowered, and his fingers twitched as if it would be to his liking to clasp them about the throat of the Hoosier "mudsill" before him, but his reason told him that he would be but a plaything in Gordon's hands, so he choked back his wrath and used a more humble tone.

"Look here, Gordon, this is all riddle to me; won't you explain?"

Gordon tossed his hat on the floor, uncrossed his legs, and leaned forward, with his elbows resting on the small centre-table.

"I can't explain it all, for I don't know the solution of the riddle, but I do know that things have taken a turn in this neighborhood."

"And who has turned them?"

"Just as I told you a minute ago, — a preacher."

"Well, what has a country preacher got to do with it?" Ormand's tone was impatient again.

"That's what I don't know exactly, but he has suddenly sprung up from the Lord knows where, and seems to know about all there is to know about this business, and has taken the pains to tell me that it won't work."

"Then you have met him?" Ormand was again twisting his beard.

Gordon's hands clenched and he half-raised himself on his elbows a moment, and then slowly settled back into his chair.

"Guess you haven't been about the streets any since striking town, have you?"

"Certainly not; why?"

"Because, if you had, you would not have asked that question. You would have known that I had met him." There was a mirthless smile on his lips as he finished.

"Then you mean that this meddling preacher bluffed you away from — what I wanted?"

"I mean that I had too much sense to take chances on spoiling the whole game by being caught in things I couldn't very well explain."

"But how the fellow got his information is a mystery to me."

"Don't know myself, but he found the buggy tracks and horse tracks in the woods, and as the shoe had come off that confounded broken hoof, it left a print as plain as writing. In some way he learned that the horse was mine. The rest I don't know, but it's enough to make me know that he's watching me like a hawk. So what could I do? If I had tried to get what you wanted, it's ten to one he would have played the spy, and you know what that would have meant. There's a little bad blood between us, anyway." Whereupon he gave a distorted account of the row over the gypsy.

"And you know nothing about the fellow?"

"Nothing, except that he calls himself a 'composite parson,' works on a farm, and seems possessed of a wonderful gift of gab. He's got the church people daffy with his tongue, and they don't

care a picayune about his pedigree, but I believe that he claims to hail from 'down South,' wherever that may mean."

Ormand smiled. "And his name?"

"Wayne."

"Hell! Bob Wayne?"

Ormand sprang to his feet and excitedly approached Gordon. The latter settled back in his chair and stared in wide-eyed astonishment at this sudden outburst.

"That's the name. Have you met him?"

"Never mind. What is he doing here?"

"Just what I said, preaching and working on a farm."

"Humph! Whose farm?"

"Wilson's."

"Wilson's! Well, damn me for a fool! Wilson's! That's the farm where — where —"

"Where we want some right of way for — an electric line," broke in Gordon, with another dry grin. "What of it? The riddle is coming the other way now."

Ormand began a limping, nervous pacing of the room, muttering unintelligible sentences. Then he paused before Gordon once more.

"Of course you know the Wilson family well," he said.

"Fifteen years' acquaintance," was the reply.

"Did you ever know of a daughter being in the South a long time?"

"Yes, but that is a touchy subject around here.

The Major, old as he is, would strangle the man who mentioned it, and, as everybody in the community is ready to swear by old man Wilson, that bit of history isn't even whispered any more."

Ormand pulled a cigar from his pocket and began to chew the end of it nervously, without lighting it. His face had taken on a peculiar pallid hue, as if all the blood had suddenly been withdrawn from his cheeks.

"Well, such things are better forgotten," he said, after a period of silence. "I am sure I have no desire to rattle any family skeletons. I just wanted to see if it was the same family of Wilsons. I know something of the story, but I did not connect it with this Wilson — it is not an uncommon name, you know."

"But Wayne, what of him?"

Again Ormand paced the floor, his limp seeming more decided than ever in his nervous tread.

"You want to get rid of him?" he asked, pausing a moment.

"Do I?" There was a world of meaning in his tone, surcharged with hatred. A pleased light shone in Ormand's eyes, but he parried an instant and asked:

"For your own sake, or for the good of the cause?"

"For both reasons, but especially for my own sake."

"Then I think we can manage the parson — that is, if he's the Bob Wayne I know, and from your

description I don't think there can be any doubt. All there is for you to do is to keep quiet, and keep your eyes open and your mouth shut. I'll attend to the matter, and the first thing on the programme is for Wayne and me to meet."

"You can find him out at the Wilson place."

Ormand fumbled in his pocket for a match, and lighted his cigar before replying.

"No, I don't think I'll go there."

The two men sat in earnest conversation until the ringing of a hand-bell in front of the hotel announced that dinner was ready to be served. Then Gordon arose to go.

"I can slip out easy enough now," he said.

"All right; good-by until you hear from me."

Ormand limped down to the dining-room and found the guests, most of them farmers, deeply engrossed in the discussion of two subjects, politics and the gypsy fracas. Indeed, the two topics were in the same channel, as Sam Sloan's candidacy for sheriff on an anti-gypsy platform was one of the features.

"I don't think Sam likes the new parson, either," remarked one.

"Don't remember any parson Sam ever did like," chimed in Landlord Hausman, who occupied a seat at the head of the table, and this remark brought a smile to the lips of all who knew Sloan.

Ormand, of course, took no part in the discussion, but he kept his ears open and made mental notes of the names of people who were declared to

be antagonistic to the preacher. He knew now what Gordon had meant by saying that he had been doing "a little boosting among the boys." Gordon was, in truth, an issue, and it was wise for him to strengthen the friendship of "the boys," and to weaken their antipathy. One or two at the table knew Ormand as the electric-line promoter, although he had never been at the hotel before, and inquired as to the prospects. His replies painted the situation rose color, and he declared that in a year's time the clang of the trolley gong would be heard in Craigville, and that new opportunities would be opened to the town and to the rural sections of Tyler County.

"It'll be a great thing for the farmers when they want to attend political meetings," said one sharp-featured enthusiast, and Ormand nodded approvingly, and said that it was a good point, whereupon the enthusiast announced his intention of getting out into the country and working "tooth and toe nail" for the subsidy.

"It's right and proper that we should help along this great enterprise," he said, whacking the table with the butt of his knife. "I feel sure that the people of Tyler County will vote the subsidy; they are too intelligent to refuse. I am willing to pay my share of the tax, you bet."

Hausman began to jerk convulsively. He knew that the enthusiast owned nothing in the world but a spavined horse and a ramshackle buggy, and that the insignificant tax on this property was sadly

delinquent. Therefore the enthusiast's declaration that he was willing to pay his share of the tax for the subsidy had appealed to his risibles in a powerful manner, for it somehow suggested to his mind the story of Artemus Ward, who had declared his willingness to sacrifice all of his wife's relations in order to put down the Rebellion. But just as he felt himself giving away to the desire to roar with laughter, he glanced up to see the eyes of the promoter regarding him steadily through his nose-glasses. The same chill that had come to him at the depot platform crept into his veins now, and the laugh died unborn.

The drowsy afternoon dragged slowly along with but little to break the quiet of the village life. Occasionally a wagon rattled by, and at rare intervals a game of quoits with horseshoes created a slight diversion across the street, but the games were always short and languid. Even the bench in front of the hotel was unoccupied, and Ormand found time heavy on his hands. The accommodation for Riverside was not due until evening, so after limping up and down the streets awhile he returned to the hotel office and stretched himself out in a chair to smoke. The languor of the day stole into his brain, and he dozed, the cigar falling to the floor.

A heavy step on the threshold aroused him, and he straightened up to find himself staring into the eyes of a man who had halted just inside the room, a broad-shouldered man wearing overalls and a

cheap straw hat. Ormand slowly arose to his feet.

"Bob Wayne!"

The preacher's face was pale, and he steadied himself with one hand against the door-casing.

"Then you escaped the grave?" he said, at last, a little irrelevantly.

"Don't talk nonsense, please."

"But I read that you were dead — killed in a railway wreck."

Ormand laughed. "The newspapers are such liars," he said.

"*You* know that well, don't you?" Wayne had withdrawn his hand from the door, and the color was surging back to his cheeks.

Ormand seemed to wince as though the thrust had touched him in a tender spot.

"Oh, come, now, we can't afford to quarrel, I reckon. I don't mind telling you that I arranged it so that I would be reported dead, and there are those — down yonder, you know — who believe me to be under the sod. It was convenient for me, and it didn't cause them any great flow of tears. I might add that I thought you — elsewhere."

The preacher took a hasty step forward, his hands clenched, his eyes blazing.

✓ "George Morse, for three years I have made it a practice to spit upon the ground whenever your name came to my lips. Now I have decided on a change and shall spare the ground that indignity by using your face instead." As he finished he spat

squarely in the face of the promoter, and then stood with folded arms looking at him in contempt.

A gasp of rage escaped the promoter, and his hand darted toward his hip pocket, but the preacher laughed scornfully.

"Don't try dramatics," he said, "because you're too much the coward to execute your threats."

Ormand's hand dropped by his side. Then he wiped his face with his handkerchief.

"I don't care to kill you," he answered. "There are better ways of getting revenge."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, damn you. I know those who will be glad to learn the whereabouts of convict No. 2245."

The preacher's lips tightened into a straight line, and Ormand retreated a few steps.

"The papers were filled with the account of your escape," continued the promoter, "but they said that you had been traced to Australia."

Wayne smiled. "The papers are such liars," he said, "for here I am in Indiana."

"But you won't be here long, let me tell you," snarled the promoter, "for as soon as you leave this room I shall turn you over to the marshal, and I'll warrant he'll be glad enough to claim the reward."

"Oh, no, you won't." The preacher smiled again.

"The devil I won't! And why not?"

"Because I always carry a preventive for such acts as you threaten." He reached into his inside

pocket and drew forth a paper. "Here it is — a pardon duly signed by the governor and bearing the State seal of Florida."

"Then it's a forgery."

"Wrong again. After I left — there, I was fortunate enough to do a great service to the governor, and when I told him my story — all of it — the *truth* — he gave me this. That part you overlooked in the papers."

"And your business here?"

"Is to preach and work and forget. Or, rather, that was my business. I have changed my plans somewhat."

"You mean — what?"

"I mean that God has marvelously led me and has shown me a duty, a work that none but myself can accomplish. He has put it within my power to atone for a seeming wrong and to lift the burden from hearts that are breaking in proud silence."

"You mean the Wilsons?"

"Ah! So you have been told of their residence in this community."

"I have been there."

"So I have learned, but I am pretty sure that you did not dream at whose door you stood, and, thank God, I know you saw no one but the old man."

Ormand looked searchingly at the preacher. "You don't mean that — that —" He stopped.

"I only mean that you are not to go to that house again."

"But if I choose to do so?"

"You will not so choose." Wayne's tone was hard, and the other dropped his gaze.

"I can't say that I care to," he said. "But I understand that you are fighting my electric line."

"I am fighting nothing that is honest. I don't know about this electric line, but I shall find out."

"Well, all I want of Wilson is to purchase a strip of right of way of him. Nothing wrong about that, is there?"

"Not on the face of it, but I can't imagine you connected with anything honest."

"Complimentary to an old friend, aren't you?" Ormand's nerves had quieted and he had resumed the old drawl.

"Friend? Was Brutus a friend when he sank a dagger into Cæsar? But here comes the landlord and I don't care to be seen in your company."

"So it is to be war, is it?" sneered the promoter, as Wayne turned toward the door.

"It is to be justice," he replied, and passed out.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GLORIOUS FOURTH

DROWSY, dreamy June merged into sultry July, but nothing occurred to break the midsummer quiet in the Wilson neighborhood. Wayne preached each Sunday at the Walnut Grove Church and his congregations were only limited by the size of the building, and frequently men who had given their seats to women stood in the aisles and even crowded about outside the door in order to hear.

His words appealed to the hearts of the people, as well as to their intellects, and though hearts and brains were undoubtedly made simultaneously by the Creator, the former were in active service long before the brain began its peculiar, mysterious function whereby men are caused to think. The utterances that were delivered from Walnut Grove pulpit each Sunday were sermons — not lectures. The words carried peace to the heart, and comfort to the soul, and at the same time were a balm to the intellect, for the way of salvation as pointed out by this composite parson was so plain that none need search for the light with an encyclopedia or a theo-

logical digest in hand, and the prayers that were wafted up to God savored not of a book of rhetoric, sprinkled with midnight oil.

He gave to them a new eloquence that was devoid of stilts; he preached to them of Christ and Him crucified; he stripped the draperies and man-made foibles from the Bible and held it up to mankind with the glory of God showing forth in beauty. He told them of a God of love; he deplored hypocrisy, and taught them the doctrine that "not every man who saith, Lord, Lord, shall be saved." And men talked in the fields of the parson who earned his daily bread by the toil of his hands, who spoke to them with a heart filled with understanding for the emotions of men. The commandments of the sages who formulated creeds, they scoffed at; the commandments of God they revered, and though they sometimes failed in their fulfillment, they were yet nearer the goal than if their hearts had not been opened unto the Word.

Some there were who attended the services and spoke to the preacher concerning the organization of a choir, but with a smile he told them that he preferred to have his congregation for his choir, as he did not care to have any feel that they were there to be entertained. He was not opposed to choirs, he said, but felt that Walnut Grove Church was better with every man, woman, and child in attendance feeling as though they had a part to perform in the service. His simple arguments carried conviction, and on service days the little church

at the crossroads rang with the inspiring hymns of Zion, sung by the full, free voices of the people of the farms, whose spirit crept into the words and increased their fervor.

The Fourth of July was at hand, and Craigville business men had determined that the day must be fittingly observed. Riverside had flooded the country with gaudy posters descriptive of a celebration to be held there, so the men of Craigville indulged in a liberal splattering of red and blue printing ink, and alongside the Riverside posters were bills but little less pretentious announcing in bold type that "the eagle had builded its nest in the beautiful little city of Craigville and would scream from earliest dawn until night." The people of that township were loyal to the village, and for a week before the Fourth even politics took a minor part in the talk of the countryside. Craigville's prospective big time was first in everybody's mind. Jap Munson had declared the whole thing to be a farce.

"The Declaration of Independence has been trampled upon, insulted, and disgraced," he had said to Wayne, "and this country's goin' to be an empire in about two shakes of a sheep's tail if the people don't open their eyes. McKinley don't mean any harm, but Mark Hanna is bound to make him an emperor, and McKinley's just letting old Hanna run the thing."

"Oh, come, Munson, I am sure that your fears

are groundless. The Stars and Stripes will never float over any but a free republic."

"Then the Stars and Stripes will be used for floor mops, and another flag will be afloat over this country. Don't know as I blame McKinley so much, though. It'd be a bully thing to be an emperor. Why, back in '73 when silver was —"

"Isn't that a splendid stand of wheat?" queried the preacher, anxious to escape the '73 arraignment, and waving his hand in a sweeping manner toward the field in front of where they sat on a fence.

"Nothing better in the county," responded Jap, enthusiastically, and then dropping into his all-is-lost tone of voice, he added: "But it's all for nothing, Parson, all for nothing. In the face of what's bound to come I don't see how people can go whoopin' around about the 'glorious Fourth,' the Declaration of Independence, and all that."

The Fourth was ushered in with a blast of heat, "straight from the factory," as Timothy Craig expressed it later in the day. One moment the sun crouched behind a wooded knoll, then a cock crew, and the fiery ball leaped to its post in the brassy sky and with brazen blows began welding the hours into a flaming pathway of torture.

Early in the morning the buggies and farm wagons began passing, each containing men, women, or children, or all, dressed in their Sunday best, and the women with large baskets of lunch carefully guarded. The programme in Craigville would not commence before ten o'clock, but by ar-

rising early the farmers could get their odds and ends of business attended to and be care-free when the bicycle, wheelbarrow, and sack races began. The wheat was drooping, golden-hued, under the hot caress of the July sun, and it was high time the harvesters were at work, yet but few reaper wheels turned that day. On the next, harvest would begin in earnest; for the present joyousness must supersede labor.

Breakfast was scarcely over at the Wilson place when they heard a familiar "Hello, in there!" and saw Jap Munson's wagon containing his family standing at the side of the road before the house. The old man insisted that they come in and visit awhile, and with much protesting Munson tied his horse, and then lifted his wife and the flock to the ground. Still protesting, he headed the procession to seats under the trees.

"I'm in an awful rush, Major," he declared, mopping his brow. "Got a lot of business to 'tend to in Craigville before the band begins to play."

"Why, Jasper," interposed his wife, "I'm sure I don't know what you've got to do."

"There, Major, listen to that, will you? That's a woman speaking. It isn't especially Mrs. Jasper Munson, but it's a *woman*. Don't know what I've got to do? Why, I've got to show a lot of people the error of their ways. I'm to be the next trustee of this township, but I won't be if I loaf around under shade-trees."

"Is Johnny quite well now?" asked Lorraine of

Mrs. Munson, as she saw symptoms of free silver in Jasper's speech.

"Oh, dear, no, Lorry. Johnny hasn't been a bit well this week. I do believe he's got rheumatism, young as he is. You know I have been afflicted with it for years. Only the other day I got perfectly helpless with it—didn't I, Jasper?—and I wouldn't be surprised if I had another spell to-day. And now Johnny has it real bad. Johnny, come here," she called to the boy, who was playing leap-frog with another of the flock. "Isn't your rheumatism paining you?" she asked, as the boy came bounding toward her. He stopped short and then, with a painful limp, insisted that his legs were as stiff as pokers.

Further discussion of the aches and pains to which Mrs. Munson and the boy were heirs was cut short by the pop of Jap's blacksnake whip and his stormy declaration that he was in a rush.

"Glad to see Walnut Grove Church filled up every Sunday, Parson," he said, forgetting his hurry and contentedly chewing at a wheat straw. "By jing, you're a talker, all right! Never mind; no taffy about this; it's straight goods. Never thought you was good-looking until I heard you layin' it off up there on the platform. Dogged if you didn't begin to get better lookin'."

"Jasper!" It was his wife's thin voice raised in spiritless chiding.

"It's a fact! Say, Parson, if you'd stump the township for me, I'd just roll into that trustee's

office; yes, sir, just go to sleep and fall in." The whip cut a circle and cracked near where little Johnny was wallowing on the grass.

"Get up from there, young man, or you'll spoil them pants, and hard times are comin' faster'n a horse can trot. But I'm in a rush, folks, and I guess we'd better be a-joggin' along."

"Jasper's so wrapped up in politics, you know," said his wife, in an apologetic tone, as she arose and followed him toward the wagon. Little Johnny turned a few flip-flops, and then, suddenly remembering that he was sorely afflicted, limped dreadfully, while his mother called everybody's attention to the fact that he was crippled with rheumatism.

"Things are gettin' warm, you bet, and if a man expects to win in politics he's got to keep circulatin'," responded Munson, and then, plucking Wayne by the sleeve, he said to him in an aside: "You're an issue, Parson. Sam Sloan's comin' out for sheriff on an anti-gypsy platform, and that muss of yours won't be forgotten until after the campaign."

The preacher gave him a sly kick with his heel, and Munson turned to find Lorraine beside him. Surprised by her sudden appearance, he fled to the wagon and piled his family in helter-skelter. Then, with a flourish of his beloved blacksnake, he was off.

Wayne stood under the trees alone with Lorraine, for the others had gone to the house when the Munson family drove away. He caught the flash of a

bluebird's wing and heard the droning of the bees as they circled about in the dancing rays of heat. The breath of July was hot and withering to plant life, so that patches of brown, singed grass sprinkled the extensive yard, but here in the shade born of that same sunshine it was cool, the grass remained green, and the breeze that staggered from the burning expanse into this retreat became tempered amid the leafy boughs and eddied in refreshing gusts about the great trees, the hammock, and the rustic bench. The preacher was wondering how much of Munson's speech the girl had heard. He felt that he had no right to feel as he did toward her. Many times since he had found that George Morse was among the living he had told himself that he must throttle the small, pulsing thing that was stealing into his heart, aye, into his very soul, if there be a difference. He knew his duty; it was not difficult to see. But he had waited, waited as he tried to convince himself, "for a more favorable opportunity." He had plodded the fields and argued with himself that though a duty be plain, it were right to be discreet. At times he found that he was shrinking, and then would come a vision of a great white Cross, and at its foot was standing one who mutely pointed to the drops of the Savior's blood chastening the Cross. It was no fanciful picture; he knew that his brain was not unbalanced; he was steady-nerved, cool, and critically calculating, and he knew that the Cross was there, and that as it had once rested on the spot where

the sins of his past lay buried, as it had proven his refuge then and had supported him as in his half-conscious dreams he clung to it, so it now stood before him, his only hope in the darkness of failing courage.

These thoughts had come to him in the fields; in the woodlands, as he tramped restlessly forth; in the serene beauty of the night as he lay staring at the splash of white which the moon had spilled on his coverlid. And now they came surging back to his brain, crowding one upon the other like a stampede when the cry of fire is raised. Only a moment he stood silent; then he bowed with unusual gravity to the girl.

"Let me offer you a seat," he said, striding to the hammock and spreading wide its meshes. She followed him, but with a smile declined the hammock.

"I believe I prefer the rustic," she said, and sank into it lightly, gracefully, in a manner that oddly reminded Wayne of the time when the butterfly had settled on the rim of his hat.

"Then I must take the hammock," he responded. There was no mirth in his tone; indeed, there was but little emotion of any description. His voice sounded mechanical, as though his heart and brain were wrestling with other problems. He did not realize the meaning that his words conveyed until he saw her look quickly into his face. Then he inwardly berated himself for the speech, but he could frame no explanation,

no apology that seemed fitting, so he remained silent.

"Am I dangerous?" she asked, a smile dimpling her cheeks. She looked away as she spoke and seemed to be intently studying the field of yellow grain that lay just beyond the broad highway white and suffocating with dust. He seated himself sidewise in the hammock with both hands clutching the meshes. His feet, flat on the ground, held him immovable.

"Yes," he said, simply, "you are."

Then her gaze came back from the wheat-field, and the blush of the ripened grain was mirrored in her cheeks. Her eyes met his squarely for a moment.

"Why?" she asked, and though a new brilliancy was in her eyes, her tone was as calm as though she were asking one of her pupils a question in mathematics.

"Because," was the laconic reply.

Wayne thought of the time when he had assured Bruno that he was a fool, and he longed to put his arms around the animal's shaggy neck and repeat the declaration. He was aroused by a merry peal of laughter from Lorraine.

"Why, Mr. Wayne, to think that the 'composite parson' should make such an admission! And just as I was about to offer my congratulations for the latest title you have won."

He looked at her rather stupidly. "I don't think I quite understand; what title?" he asked.

"Why, the 'Parson Militant,' to be sure. Did you think I would not hear of the gypsy affair?"

He arose stiffly and stood before her, hat in hand. "I feared you would, but was foolish enough to hope not. There are incidents that do not increase one's self-pride. That is one of them."

"You preachers have a queer point of view, — queer to me, I mean, — although I had about convinced myself that you were altogether different. And do you know that I was about to applaud you for the part you took that day?"

"I hardly think you are acquainted with all of the facts in the case; perhaps you do not know who the principals were."

"I think I do. At least, I know that Mr. Gordon was abusive to a gypsy, and that you interfered — rather forcibly, I think."

"And in the face of that you offer me your congratulations?" He still stood before her, less stiffly, perhaps, but the twirling of his straw hat betrayed his nervousness.

"Most certainly I do," she replied, with a sudden glance. "I fear that you do not understand Indiana girls, Mr. Wayne. I, for one, admire physical and moral courage. I am sure that you have both."

He turned and resumed his seat in the hammock.

"You make me ashamed of myself," he said, slowly.

"And why, pray?"

"I can only answer, 'Because.' Somehow, my tongue is in rebellion to-day, and refuses to frame the sentiments of my heart."

She leaned forward and picked up a fallen leaf, and, as was her habit when absorbed in thought, began pulling it to pieces.

"You must pardon me, Mr. Wayne, but you are more of a mystery to me than you were the day I first heard your name."

"There are mysteries that are better unsolved," he responded, moodily.

"But I cannot help wondering why you should come into this community as you have, and work as you have. I know you were born for a different sphere, that it was not intended that you should labor in the fields as —"

"I must weary the body to rest the brain," he interrupted.

"I do not understand."

"That you do not is because I am too big a coward to tell you; because I am not morally strong enough to do my duty." He had arisen and was striding back and forth under the trees, his face pale with the exception of a scarlet spot that burned on each temple. She sat silent, and suddenly halting before her, he exclaimed:

"I have seen the grave give up its dead. I have seen a hideous past rise out of the glamour of a roseate present — I have stood face to face with George Morse." She parted her lips as though to speak, but with a gesture he stopped her and continued,

almost fiercely: "Yes, I saw him, and it was only the vision of an angel pointing to a Cross that kept my hands from his throat."

She sat pale and with her hands clasped in her lap, and, as he paused, she asked, in a voice that was almost a whisper:

"You know — *him?*"

"It brings a blush to my cheeks to say 'Yes.' For three years I spat upon the ground at the thought of his name. When we met, I spat in his face instead. I knew him when he insulted the Suwanee by breathing the air that floated from it; I knew him when he enticed a girl to an altar that proved for her the guide-post to misery, and it is for her sake that I now permit him to go his way. I have preached Christ to those who honor me by attending my services, yet I have proven unworthy because I have hesitated to make open statement in this household that that human viper has been in the neighborhood."

Her face was buried in her hands and she was sobbing softly when he finished, but, looking up, she saw the deep lines that his battle had drawn on his face, and, brushing aside the tears, she said, in tones that evidenced a breaking heart by their measured evenness:

"Sit down, Mr. Wayne."

"I cannot — I must not sit; I have sat too long already. I remained here determined to right a wrong, and frustrate what I believed to be another plot, and yet I hesitated to speak or act. The warn-

ing I have now given you, and it only remains for me to — ”

“What?” Her voice quavered as she asked the question when he paused.

“For me to — go.” He turned and leaned against a tree, his gaze once more straying to the fields of ripened grain.

“But I beg of you not to go. Perhaps I should not say it, but, since you have told me of — him, I feel that we need you more than ever. Father is a stern man, Mr. Wayne, and I believe your influence is needed here. It is well that you told me first of all that that man is in the neighborhood.”

“I felt that it was my duty to tell you first.”

She looked at him a little curiously a moment, checked a speech that rose to her lips, and then, after another pause, said:

“You have no doubt prevented a tragedy.”

“A tragedy! You don’t mean — ”

“You have often seen the shotgun hanging in the sitting-room. Father comes of New England stock that does not forgive, a race that can see atonement only in the law of Moses, ‘An eye for an eye,’ and, had he known, he would have shouldered that gun, and with a prayer on his lips would have — oh, I cannot say the word!”

Once more he was striding back and forth, his jaws set, his hands clenched until the blood was forced back into the wrist veins.

“And you?” he asked, without ceasing his tramp. “And you — wish him — spared?”

She sprang to her feet, her eyes flashing, the tears gone, and, seizing his arm, stopped him before her.

"I wish my father spared," she exclaimed in clear-cut tones. "He has borne enough without the added suffering that would come to him if he should — if he should obey the instincts of the only flint in his nature. For myself, God forgive me, I could smile on George Morse's dead features!" She sank back on the settee, and Wayne felt a curious thrill of exultation shoot from his heart.

"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, oh, leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me."

The old man was slowly approaching from the house, and was rolling out the grand old hymn as though no one were near.

Lorraine looked quickly at Wayne. "It is on his mind," she said. "When the cross seems greater than he can bear, he seeks comfort in that hymn. You will remain with us awhile longer, and keep silent?" Her voice was eager, pleading, and he bowed.

The old man came up to them, but stood without speaking for a full minute. A rose-bush creeping up the weather-boarding of the house freighted a petal with fragrance, and sent it to them on the wings of a passing breeze, and from some unseen field the scent of clover came straying. To Wayne it seemed that the Major had grown older, his hair

sweeping back from his brow seemed whiter even than usual, and his face looked wan. He thought of what Lorraine had said, "It is on his mind," and a great pity welled up in his heart, and he longed to stroke the silvered hair and tell him that he was understood; that there was one whose arm was strong who was ready to help him carry his burden and to battle for justice. But he remembered also that she had said that her father came of New England stock who were stern, unforgiving, and unyielding. A glance at the strong lines of his face and the firm chin and nose told him that she was right; he was not yet ready to forgive, though hearts broke. It was not the hardness of cruelty; it was the flint of justice, so believed. The preacher knew that he would be powerless to bring reconciliation now, no matter what showing he might make, and, indeed, it might result in the old man leading him to the door and pointing him to the woodlands from which he had emerged when he had so strangely entered into their life. And, as he reflected, he realized that the girl was right. "We need you more than ever," she had said, but he knew that she had meant, "I need you." He would stay, he told himself, cost what it might.

The old man turned slowly from his survey of apparently the fields, in reality nothing but the years long fled.

"It is a glorious prospect for harvest, Mr. Wayne," he said. "We should be in the fields now."

"I am ready," responded the preacher, simply.

"No — no, not until to-morrow. I am a bit old-fashioned, maybe, but I never work on Independence Day. God wondrously blessed our flag; I believe that He pleases that we show it reverence."

"In spite of the fact that our country is soon to become an empire?" Wayne asked, in a bantering manner, trying to lead the other's thoughts to lighter subjects.

"Munson's a good fellow, but 'viewing with alarm' is meat and drink to him," responded the Major, a smile softening the lines of his face.

"And I believe that he takes keen delight in figuring on what new complaint will beset his wife and Elihu and Johnny," added Lorraine, flashing Wayne a grateful look and striking another blow at the gloom that beset her father.

"Well, well, she is blessed with good health, and if she enjoys being miserable, I am not the one to deny her." The Major was chuckling, and then, turning away, he added: "We'll all go to Craigville this afternoon to see the celebration. Time enough after an early dinner."

He walked slowly back to the house, and Wayne watched him, a world of pity sweeping over him. The girl's eyes were following the bent form, and as he rounded the corner, after first stopping to pluck a rose and press it to his lips, she turned slowly to the man who sat before her, and as the sunbeams filtered for a moment through the boughs, they glinted on a tear trembling on the heavy lashes.

Once more her hands were clasped in dumb suffering, and he arose, with a wild, almost irresistible longing to clasp her in his arms, to beg her to sob out there the woe that he felt was in her heart, and it seemed to him that then, with his great, strong arms about her, his coward soul could absorb the strength of which he was in such sore need. But, even as the yearning came to him, he saw that it was a weakness. He had no right. The Cross stood before him, and the peace of conquered self stole into his soul. He took a step away, and then turned slowly, and naught but calmness was in his voice as he spoke.

“I will stay,” he said, and as he strode away he caught the sound of a sob. He did not turn, but the veins on his forehead became swollen rivers of blood, and the fences, the fields, the woodlands, danced unsteadily before him, like unto the rays of heat that frolicked amongst the grain.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAD DOG

DINNER was served early, and a stranger would not have guessed the heavy hearts that were at that board, — hearts that were at cross purposes, misunderstood and misunderstanding. Susanna had scorched the pudding while gazing down the road, looking for — none asked who. But at last, when the smell of burned victuals had recalled her in dismay to the range, her heart jumped, for out in the lane, bordered by mulberry and hawthorn trees, she heard a light tenor gaily singing:

“I loved her, but she thought I didn’t mean it.”

And a minute later the singer had turned his horse over to the chore-boy, and was bowing to the group in the dining-room.

“A noontide health to you, good sirs and ladies fair,” he said. “And to you, especially, beauteous one,” he added, turning to Susanna. “I can scarce control the emotions that tread my nerves as I perceive that you are either by accident or design — and far be it from me to assert the latter or to

content myself with the former — standing beneath mistletoe, and — ”

“ Oh, I say, Paragraph,” called Joe, “ that’s as bad as your ’possum story. That’s not mistletoe; that’s plain American dog-fennel that some of the Munson kids stuck up there.”

“ It matters not, Joe, it matters not. ‘ A rose by any other name would smell as sweet,’ and dog-fennel is just as potent as the purest mistletoe that ever graced the banquet-halls of merrie England.”

“ Well, never mind the mistletoe, or dog-fennel, either. I saw your name written in the dinner-pot half an hour ago, so be seated,” and Joe arose and led him to a seat.

“ Ah, my thoughtless friend, but know you not that, when the heart is starving, flesh-pots have no temptations? Methought ’twas mistletoe that hung above the door, but you declare that ’tis dog-fennel, and I wish to assert my Americanism on this glorious day by stating that the dog-fennel, fresh from the fragrant meadows where honey-bees dream — ”

“ Until some barefoot boy steps on them and wakes them up,” broke in the preacher, thereby causing a look of unutterable woe to overspread the reporter’s face.

“ Parson, I didn’t think it of you; you who have inhaled the fragrant poesy of the cypress-trees and the entrancing melody of the mocking-bird. But, as I was saying — please pass the bread; no one can make such bread as Mrs. Wilson; an epi-

cure idling among the chefs of Paris would be enraptured with it — the dog-fennel that nodded on Bunker Hill, that yellowed the plains of Yorktown, that has smarted the eyes of every American youth from George Washington down to little Elihu Munson, should supersede the aristocratic mistletoe, and the Viking spirit within me, whispering down from generations long sleeping, bids me make declaration that henceforth the dog-fennel shall proclaim forfeit, e'en as the mistletoe granted blessed privilege in the days of Lochinvar."

"Mother, you must avoid that doorway and crawl through the window," said Joe, solemnly.

"Joseph, you should not mock William. I am sure that his patriotism is a splendid thing, and his speech is inspired by an undying love of country and —"

"Susanna," added Joe, and a general laugh arose, which, fortunately, the blithe farm lass did not hear, as she had fled to the dairy.

"And how is the *Sun*?" asked the old man, as the meal progressed.

Paragraph hesitated a moment and glanced out of the window. "Well, I suppose the *Sun* is all right," he said, more soberly. "The fact is, I am not one of the *Sun*-beams now."

He felt the battery of curious eyes, and twisted uneasily in his chair. "I know you're all surprised and a little curious, though you are above expressing it. I don't like to speak of such things before

the Parson. He sort of makes me ashamed of myself."

"Mr. Miller, you must remember that I am a man first of all, and I have made mistakes, doubtless more than you have — and graver."

"But you never threw a man out of a door!" blurted out Paragraph, his cheeks reddening.

"No," said Lorraine, quietly, "Mr. Wayne simply threw his man across a sidewalk." The preacher would have sworn that he caught a gleam of something very near to admiration in her eyes and a faint triumphant ring to her tone. He flushed rather guiltily, but felt a curious little pang of regret that he had not flung Gordon still farther.

"Your confidences are your own, William," admonished the Major, gently.

"But I want to tell it. I couldn't resist doing as I did. He came into the office and began offering money for the *Sun's* support of an electric-line subsidy. The blood got into my head somehow, and when I cooled down I saw the fellow lying in a heap out in the hall. They said I threw him there. I felt sorry, because, when he walked away, he limped. That ended my career with the *Sun*."

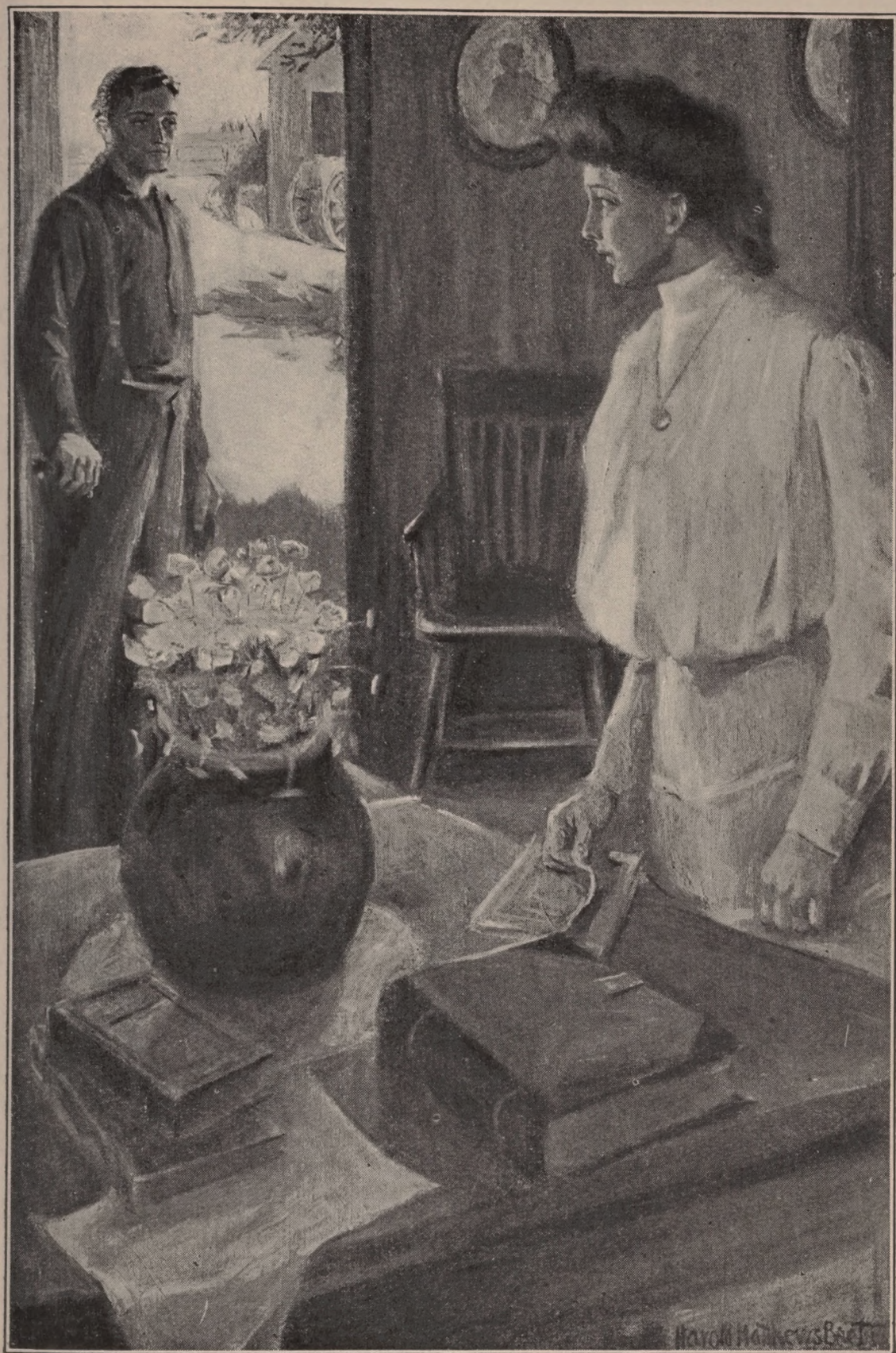
Wayne raised his head, and then, as if challenging his hearers to dispute his words, he said: "And I think the world needs more William Millers, men who are ready to cast contamination from the editorial rooms."

"Limped, did he? Maybe he was the same fellow who came here." It was the old man who

spoke, and Wayne, raising a glass of water to his lips, glanced at Lorraine, but was astonished to note that the reference to the limp had made no apparent impression. He wondered if recent events had so affected her that she was dulled to further prodding on this subject. Could it be possible that this girl, with the pink glow of health in her cheeks, was of the flint of the bluff hillsides of the New England State from which her ancestry had sprung?

"I am sorry, William, that you have resorted to violence, but, when I ask myself, 'What would you have your boy do in the face of such an insult?' I cannot say that his chastisement was undeserved." It was the quiet, sweet tones of the mother's voice, and Wayne felt an impulse to take her in his arms and ask her to teach him, for in her tone there was naught but belief that the tempter had been smitten; she did not view it as a brawl. To him there came the memory of another, a sweet-faced woman whom he had called by the sacred name of mother. Out of the mists beyond the grave she came to him, and in his ears there were the remembered tones of her voice as she sang to him the lullabies that the Southland knew. He felt that he should like to cry out to her now, as she seemed so near, and implore her to guide him as she had supported his tottering baby steps.

He was conscious that Paragraph was stumbling over a reply to the mother's words, and that Joe and the Major were declaring that Miller had done the



"I FEARED YOU WOULD — WOULD DISAPPROVE," HE SAID.

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only thing possible for a man of honor to do under the circumstances, and then he heard Lorraine, in a laughing manner, say that Paragraph should become a member of the church militant at Walnut Grove. He racked his brain for words with which to form a reply, but his vocabulary was a mass of wreckage, engulfed in one burning thought: "She knows that I crushed Jim Gordon — and she approves!" He feared to place a speech on his tongue, lest his furiously beating heart should topple it over and cause him to shout aloud that one glorious song: "She knows — and approves!" "She knows — and approves!"

The remainder of the meal was a confused jumble, composed of bright sallies by Paragraph, bits of sound advice from the Major, prayerful utterances from Mrs. Wilson, and an angel's wand that floated about, gilding the old-fashioned dining-room with dimples of sunshine and interspersing it all with merry laughter that hushed the wild birds and put the glow of old wine into the preacher's veins. Then he found himself following the others into the sitting-room, and for a moment he stood beside Lorraine, and, yielding to an impulse, he clapped his hands and laughed in sudden abandon.

"You are happy," she said, looking at him curiously.

"I feared you would — would disapprove," he said, irrelevantly, and then walked out into the yard to join the men, leaving her standing there alone.

When the party reached town, they found Craigville in a flurry of excitement. Bunting hung in lavish display everywhere, and, because there were not enough stores and residences to suit the ideas of the committee on decoration in regard to the eternal fitness of things in a decorative way, they had wrapped the shade-trees and hitching-posts with the bunting, until the town was a monster chameleon, changing hues, red, white, or blue, as the blazing sun attacked the decorations from divers points of view. The village's supply of flags was small, but garrets had been ransacked, and every ensign was flung to the breeze either from house windows or by having the staffs sunk into the ground in the front yard.

Here and there darted bicyclists, their wheels revolving discs of Columbia's proud colors, and rosy-cheeked girls from the farms tripped by with tiny flags bedecking their hair. The members of the Craigville Cornet Band were conspicuous in the passing throng by their gaily colored uniforms, and occasionally one was seen with a horn tucked under his arm, and all had fair sweethearts by their sides. On the occasion of a village celebration of any event, the members of the band are always the observed of all observers.

Over in the "Commons," as a broad expanse of unoccupied territory was known, a bower had been erected for the afternoon exercises. Posts and stringers and crosspieces were thickly interlaced with green, leafy boughs brought in from

near-by woods by the committee on speaker's stand. In this cool, leafy retreat rough benches had been placed for those who should be so fortunate as to secure a seat on them. These seats were limited, and the balance of the patriotic ones had the privilege of standing out in the sun.

Soon after noon the crowd surged toward this bower, and in a short time those who stood around on the outside were the only fortunate ones. They had the pleasure of moving about, while the patriotic mass of humanity on the benches gasped for the breezes that staggered about beneath the boughs. Fans waved frantically, men soaked their handkerchiefs in perspiration from their brows, and from all quarters came the distressing wail of babies protesting against this sacrifice to the cause of freedom.

The party from Wilson's rested a few minutes at the Craig home, and then, reinforced by the addition of Miss Bess to the crowd, they went over to hear the speaking, but generously (or ungenerously, probably) declined to take a seat on the benches. When the hour for the beginning of the exercises arrived, there was a murmur of astonishment from the party as Jap Munson stepped to the front of the stage and assumed the duties of master of ceremonies. First came a "tune by the band," as Jap announced it, and then a long invocation by a local preacher. After this Munson faced the crowd, and Wayne imagined he saw his right hand twitching as though he were longing to grasp the pliable handle of his beloved black-

snake. With it in his hand he would have been a conqueror addressing his subjects; without it, he was a Samson with his locks shorn.

He told the crowd how proud he was to stand before them on that auspicious occasion. Many anniversaries of the day had galloped into history, he said, but the present Fourth was heavily freighted with dangers and possibilities. "You hear me—you hear *me!*" he shouted, and the prominent men who sat on the platform began to look askance at each other. "This great republic is tottering on the brink of national disaster, ready to topple into the abyss, or to be drawn back to safety by the sturdy hands of freemen." He paused and took a drink of water, and one of the prominent citizens crossed the platform to whisper in a dubious way to another. Wayne was ready to shout with laughter as he saw how Jap had played the committee into his hands so that he could shake his political mania in the faces of his auditors. "But, gentlemen," continued Munson, "though the terrible Crime of '73 is staining our land, the question that perches on our own thresholds is that of the selection of a township trustee. I falter in bringing this question before you, for my own name has been heralded throughout Willow township as a candidate for that most important office, but when the shadow of the poorhouse is lengthening about us, I must cast aside my native modesty and speak, even as Jesus of Nazareth spoke to the sons of men, warning them of dire days to

come, and warning them that the way of salvation was through Him. In '73 — ”

The terrible revelation pertaining to '73 was not born, and neither did Jap have opportunity to make clear whether or not he intended to place himself beside the figure of the Christ, for the chairman of the committee on arrangements bent forward and interrupted him with a hoarse whisper that bore the tone of a command, and Jap, after choking and spluttering a moment, suddenly turned toward a man who sat close behind him, and, taking him by the hand, led him to the front of the stage and introduced him as the orator of the day.

In the crush and elbowing about the edge of the bower, Wayne became separated from his party, and now, as the orator began tracing the marvelous history of the country from the time Columbus landed until the present, he began working his way out of the throng. He wandered up the street, seeking a quiet place. His thoughts were rioting, and the presence of the crowd irritated him. An empty soap-box in the shade of a tree looked inviting, and he sat down. No one paid any attention to him, for nowhere is a man so much alone as is a stranger in the midst of a crowd of merrymakers. “She knows — and approves!” The sentence kept whirling through his brain in a curious manner, and he wondered for a moment if he were quite sane. If not, he declared to himself that insanity was the most blissful state imaginable, for his nerves were tingling and his pulse seemed dancing

to the music of his heart. He yielded his brain to his heart for a moment, and confessed to himself that he loved Lorraine Wilson. But, even as the acknowledgment came, a wee voice piped to him that he was sinning. She belonged to another! God knew it and he knew it, but did even *she* know it? He had nerved himself to right a wrong, but when righting it meant death to his heart, did he dare do it? With a prayer for forgiveness, she had declared that she could smile on the dead features of the man whom he alone, perhaps of all the world, knew was her lawful husband. What right had he to love her? Did not his Bible teach him that it was sin? But the flood swept from his heart like Niagara's torrent, and paused not for the commandments of God or the conventions of men. Sin it was, but, though it was of scarlet, he was powerless in its sweep. Believing George Morse dead, his plans were clear, but, with Morse, *her husband*, living, he was torn by a tempest of conflicting emotions. He clenched his jaws in the old way that betokened resolve, and told himself that he would follow Duty. But of what did his duty consist? Declarations at once, unsupported by proof, or a biding of the time when he could stand with the proofs and with God's strength dash his own hopes to earth, and perhaps bring further misfortune to her? He was trembling violently, and turned to the Cross for direction, but about the Cross a mist was encircling and he was left groping helplessly. He looked into his heart and saw that

Self was separating him from Calvary's altar. A low moan of agony arose to his lips, but it was stilled by a sudden wild clamor and shouting.

"Mad dog!" "Mad dog!"

He was aroused from his self-communings, and heard the rush of a crowd stampeded. The fear-crazed throng was parted, and rushed by him in an insane desire to find safety.

"Mad dog!" "Mad dog!"

No one who has not heard the appalling shout can appreciate how frantic people, otherwise brave, become in their efforts to escape. The chill that goes to the heart when one finds himself confronted by a deadly cobra is less terrorizing than that chill which strikes to the nerves of those who hear the shout of "Mad dog!" And the greater the crowd the greater the terror, for the danger remains unseen, hidden by a human mask, until death in awful form is at one's side.

Wayne had heard that cry before, but, standing beside the tree, he paused to look for the danger. In that instant's pause the street was cleared.

Down the street came the dog, a great muscular hound, with that peculiar swinging, rolling gallop common to an animal with the hydrophobia. Its head was slightly lowered, its distended jaws dripped bloody foam, while its bloodshot eyes blazed with the awful demon of rabies.

He was turning to seek safety, when a flood of sickening horror swept over him, for out from the sidewalk where it had been lost in the stampede

toddled a girl of about five years. Clapping its hands with delight at the sight of the dog, the child ran out into the street directly in its path. With a shuddering gasp, the preacher saw that the child was doomed, for there was no help, no help unless — He caught his breath sharply, and then sprang forward as a woman's agonizing scream sounded behind him, the cry of the mother. The distance was short and he threw himself between the animal and the child, just as the great brute gathered its muscles and sprang. With a quick movement he evaded the trap-like snap of the poison-dripping jaws, and then his hands closed like bands of steel about the tawny throat. The dog's hot, nauseating breath was in his nostrils, and the foam bespattered his sleeves as the beast writhed and struggled for the mastery. Tighter and tighter he gripped the hairy throat, holding the animal at arm's length in order to rob it of the advantage of having a foothold in the battle. He heard a confused babel of sounds behind him, and then a blaze of fire scorched his cheek, a sharp report rang out, and, as the dog's struggles ceased, he summoned all of his strength and flung the bleeding body from him. He turned and reeled into the arms of Bill Ward, the marshal, who held a revolver, still smoking, in his hand.

"It was a devilish stiff risk to try that shot, but it was that or —"

To Wayne the rest of the sentence trailed off into a meaningless jumble that faded into silence

as a darkness came, and he fainted. When he again opened his eyes, it was to find Joe and Bess Craig bending over him, the former half-supporting him, and the latter wielding a fan vigorously. Without speaking, Wayne twisted his head to one side and looked about him in a puzzled manner. He found that he was lying on a quilt on the floor of the Tyler House office, and then he saw a fringe of heads at the door and windows, and heard Hausman storming at the crowd to "keep away and give him all the air there is."

"Guess I must have done something foolish," said the preacher, looking at Joe, and having reference to his faint.

"You did something that but few men in Craigville to-day would have done," responded Joe, referring to the dog incident.

"And those people out there are ready to carry you on their shoulders if you give them an opportunity," added Bess, smiling.

"Then I'll not give them the opportunity," said Wayne, raising himself to a sitting posture. "I feel a little weak, but I don't want any of that kind of riding. But I am not quite clear as to the finish of — of the trouble with the dog. I think I heard a shot and felt the dog dying in my hands, and I think I saw the little girl in some woman's arms. But it's all mixed up."

"Bill Ward fired the shot, and he'd be here now if his wife hadn't collapsed as soon as she got their girl in her arms."

The preacher struggled to his feet in a weak manner, but was glad enough to accept the proffer of a chair. Outside there was a murmur of satisfaction that became audible to him, and he nodded and waved his hand in recognition.

“So it was Bill Ward’s girl, was it?” he asked, trying to force his mental machinery to run connectedly.

For answer there was a commotion at the door, and the marshal shoved his way into the room and stopped before Wayne.

“Parson,” he said, huskily, “if my wife hadn’t collapsed, I’d ’a’ been here sooner to tell you —” He paused and brushed one hand across his eyes, and then suddenly seized both of Wayne’s hands in his, and continued: “To tell you that I *know* now that there’s a God in heaven.”

CHAPTER X.

BLEACHED WITH DOG MEAT

WAYNE never could clearly recall the incidents of the ride home that evening. Memory had been so soaked with delirious joy that it refused to retain impressions distinctly, and when he turned back to that page, it was to find only a confused recollection of bubbling happiness, with dark clouds fringing the edges of the page. He recalled how the Major and Lorraine had come pushing their way into the hotel, with but few words on their lips, but with eloquence in their eyes. He remembered that Joe had hugged him, and that Paragraph had mounted the bench close by the hotel and made a speech filled with panegyrics, and that the crowd had shouted approval. Then had come the mother, with quiet dignity congratulating him on his rescue of the girl, and giving unobtrusive praise to God for His protection in those awful moments. These things he remembered as he remembered Bill Ward standing by with honest tears wetting his tanned cheeks as he murmured fervent amens to the words of Mrs. Wilson. But the ride home was a chaos in

his mind, with bits of driftwood clinging here and there to memory. He had sat beside *her*, he knew that. And he remembered that once, in turning to look over her shoulder, she had accidentally let one dainty hand rest for a moment on his. It was only for an instant, as though a pink and white rose-petal had been laid by a breeze upon a clod, only to be wafted away in an instant, but leaving the clod pulsing with life. The thrill that shot through him in that brief moment had burned its impress on memory, and he recalled that in that fleet span of time he had caught himself regretting that it had not been the throat of George Morse his fingers had clutched.

The days that followed were welcome ones to him. Under the blazing sun he followed the reaper, piling the bundles of grain into yellow shocks, monuments of God's generosity in a wilderness of stubble. He had said that he wished to weary the body to rest the brain, but the surcease was not complete. He had dropped into this peaceful community by accident, on an impulse to escape from the desert of his past, and, behold! his past had suddenly transported itself to him, to mock him, to scourge him, and then love had placed bloom in the desert, but this love had branded him as an ingrate and a coward. Day by day the haunting spectres of the past, the withered hopes for the future, and the uncertainties of the present were at his side, and, when he lay down at night, they, instead of sleep, came to his pillow. If he should

speaking, and the Major should drive him from the place, as he felt that he would, he would be defeating his duty toward her, for had she not begged him to stay? But out of the turmoil there came a resolution that when next he met George Morse there must be a reckoning.

Jim Gordon had kept his distance since that Sunday morning in the woods, and Wayne wondered if he had abandoned his game, or if he was planning some new villainy. Indeed, he was not certain that there had been any villainy planned at all, but he felt certain that the midnight expedition of the men with pick and spade was a part of some underhand game and that Gordon was connected with it. The men were driving Gordon's horse, and his rage that Sunday morning left no doubt of his connection with the plot, whatever it was. The preacher had been so absorbed with the entanglements into which he had been drawn in the last few weeks that he had found no time to probe the mystery, and, it must be confessed, it had received but scant consideration in his mind. The electric railway question had also dimmed for the time being, the farmers being interested, first, in the big Fourth of July celebration at Craigville, in which each felt a personal interest, and then in the harvest, which claimed all of their attention as soon as they had finished paying homage to patriotism. Now that harvest was near its close, the question flamed up once more, and as the board of county commissioners had ordered a special

election to determine the question of a subsidy for the company, it soon became the principal topic of conversation, and even Jap Munson let the crime of '73 lie quietly at rest for the time being while he hustled around over the township fighting the subsidy. When he found that Wayne was also opposed to the subsidy he was supremely happy and wore out a new whip-cracker in emphasizing his pleasure.

Meetings were held at the schoolhouses throughout the township and the question was debated with increasing fervor, and Jap managed to remind the voters pretty frequently that he was a candidate for trustee. It was while Munson, Joe, and Wayne were returning from one of these meetings that the preacher was given a reminder of his original plan of investigating the pick and spade expedition of the two men the first night he spent under Wilson's roof.

The night was pleasant and the harvest moon at its full was lighting the world gloriously. The men were walking home across the fields and woods and were passing along a rough, flinty strip of the Wilson farm far removed from the house, when Joe suddenly stopped.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Look here, will you?" As he spoke he kicked some loose dirt lying near. "Some one's been digging around here," he added.

"Digging for what?" asked Munson.

"That's what puzzles me. This hillside won't

grow a root of any kind, and no animal would ever attempt to burrow into it."

"Maybe some one has sailed up Willow Creek and has been searching for pirate treasure," suggested Munson, who was in a facetious mood.

They discussed the discovery a few moments, but as there was no explanation to be found they walked on. Scarcely were they out of sight, however, when a man arose from behind a log close by and stepped out into the moonlight. It was Jim Gordon, and he carried a pick and a spade.

"Damn it!" he muttered, staring after the trio, "If they'd only been half an hour later I'd 'a' had that dirt tramped down and rocks scattered over it."

Going back to the log, he picked up a sack lying in the shadow, and slinging it together with his pick and spade over his shoulders, he walked briskly away, the heavy burdens seeming but toys in his hands.

"I suppose that preacher will get nosy now," he said to himself, "but it can't be helped. It won't do to pile rocks over that place after they've found it. The thing for me to do is to get this stuff to Ormand right away."

Gordon proved a good guesser, for Wayne had begun to remember things, and as he pondered over the subject on the way home it suddenly occurred to him that the men he had seen that night were coming from the direction of that rocky hillside.

Long after he had gone to bed he lay turning the problem over and over in his mind. But it seemed impossible to get any tangible theory out of the chaotic mass that whirled through his mind. Of two things he felt certain. One was that George Morse was the chief in whatever was being done on that bleak hillside, and the other was that Jim Gordon was assisting him in some way. He determined to inspect that hillside on the following day, and having reached this decision, he fell asleep. But on the following day he was unable to find the opportunity he desired. The routine work of the farm kept him busy until noon, and then at dinner the old man asked him to drive in to Craigville and have certain work done at the blacksmith shop. Joe immediately said he would accompany him, so Wayne was forced to postpone his investigations.

A recent rain had made the road hard, smooth, and dustless, and had freshened the foliage until it gave off a faint fragrance that was like a tonic, and as they drove past the well-kept farms, the stubble showing the generosity of Nature in one respect and the fields of tall corn speaking of her graciousness in another, Wayne declared that the garden of Eden must have been located somewhere along the Wabash, to which Joe smilingly responded that he hoped he would not be driven from it.

"But I fear that even now a serpent is creeping into this paradise," said Wayne, thinking of the promoter.

Joe looked at him a little curiously. "What do you mean by that?" he asked.

The preacher hesitated a moment, regretting the speech. Then he replied: "I was thinking of this electric line subsidy business."

"Oh."

Joe turned his face away and looked across the fields and woods. Wayne was also busy with his thoughts and so they rode in silence. At last Joe turned to the preacher and asked, abruptly:

"Bob, how long are you going to stay with us?"

The unexpected query brought a slight flush to Wayne's face. "I don't know, Joe," he replied, and then added, in a jocular tone: "Are you getting anxious to be rid of me?"

"You know better than that. But — forgive me — you dropped down amongst us in such an — an unexpected manner — that — well, I feared you might be as sudden in your notion to go. I know you were not born to this, Parson, and I can't hope to have you with me for all time."

Wayne's left hand grasped the lines while his right stole across and gripped that of his companion. "One day you offered me a check, Joe, and I was thankful that I could decline it. To-day you have given me your heart and I am proud to accept it. The day will come, I suppose, and perhaps soon, when I shall be unable to remain here, but when I go I shall leave my heart here on the Wabash. For though —

“ ‘The storms of life may fiercely blow,
And sorrow in surging tides may flow,’

I shall always feel that my months in Tyler County fitted me more perfectly for heaven.”

“That is a most gracious speech, and no one appreciates it more than I. Any true Hoosier would gasp with delight at those words.”

“And true men could not refrain from speaking them under like circumstances, because they are all true. The clouds were getting pretty thick in my life until one day a glorious sunset in Tyler County gilded them with a hope. Any man who has hope is drawn closer to God. The hope may wither, but it has given him a glimpse of heaven and he will cling the closer to the Cross.”

“I believe you. I know that the day you found me sitting under that old walnut-tree in the field I was utterly forlorn, but, somehow, you have instilled a hope into my life. There are some things I want to tell you, Bob, but not yet—I can’t do it yet. But I have always wanted to thank you for that sermon you preached the first Sunday. I can’t imagine how you chanced to take just the tack you did that day, but you builded better than you knew. Ah, Bob, it is the doctrine of forgiveness that opens the heart, that enthrones peace where unrest has been gnawing. I can’t explain now, but I believe you have done this work. You have taught something broader than was instilled into our family by the generations among the flinty hills of New England.”

"It is because I have lived among the shadows that I realize the need of extending forgiveness to those who are groping there through no fault of their own, but because of mistakes or treachery. I believe religion is what the Bible teaches it to be, and that it belongs not alone to the sunshine, but that it is also adapted to the shadows. Narrowness is not Christianity. God is love, and love cannot be shut up in our hearts. It must be exercised if it is to thrive. If it is locked up it perishes, and the ashes from its hearthstones will sift before our eyes until heaven itself is dimmed."

"I feel the truth of all this, Wayne, and it is for this reason that I ventured to ask you how long you would be with us. The teachings of your sermons have not been in vain and you have so woven yourself into our lives that I dread the day when the woof must be torn apart. Lorraine said —"

Wayne turned to him eagerly. "Said what?" he asked, as the other paused.

Joe stooped down, ostensibly to tuck the hitch-strap back under the seat, and a smile flitted across his lips as he noted the other's eagerness.

"Why, Lorraine said she thought you were preparing to leave us."

The preacher fumbled the lines a moment and clucked to the horse. The hum of a threshing-machine came to him faintly like the droning of some great bee, and then he heard the echoing whistle of a locomotive, the afternoon freight for Riverside approaching Craigville. They were close

to the town now, and he could see the box cars swaying and jolting as the train wound around the little hill, and he smiled as he thought of the day when he had, in a moment of recklessness, clambered into one of those cars and started on the career of a tramp, a career that was soon ended, and which turned his life into a new channel. Then a queer train of thought entered his mind, and he began wondering where he would have been this day had the train crew not compelled him to leave the car at the tank. For one brief instant he felt a pang of regret that he had not been allowed to continue as he had begun. Then would he have escaped the goading voice of duty and lived unconscious of the heart torturings that were now his portion. A moment later he rebuked himself for these impulses. He saw the guiding hand of God in all that had taken place and felt a wave of gratitude that he had been so led that he might in the near future not only right a seeming wrong, but also clear his own name of the stigma placed on it by George Morse. His heart grew lighter as he dreamed of the day when he might force the author of all his troubles and complications to make at least partial reparation. So as they drove into Craigville he joked with Joe and even whistled a merry tune that he had known in his college days.

They drove up Main Street past the Tyler House, and the group of loafers on the bench complimented them by waving their hands in saluta-

tion. A moment later, and Landlord Hausman came plunging out to the sidewalk and called to them in a sort of a hoarse bellow. Wayne stopped the horse and waited for the German to come up. Hausman shook hands with both, giving the preacher's hand a grizzly bear sort of squeeze.

"Parson, I couldn't let you go past without shaking your hand. First time I've seen you since the dog day. Say, that fixed you all right in Craigville. That gypsy business gave you a black eye here, but you bleached it out with dog meat." He shook his sides and roared with laughter at his own joke, and when Wayne joined in the laugh he was rewarded with a hearty slap on the shoulder.

"Yes, sir," continued Hausman, "that dog outweighed the gypsy. Bill Ward's been boosting for you mighty strong, and the other day he drove out into the country and licked a derved skunk that said something mean about you. Bill wants to run you for the Legislature."

Wayne gasped in astonishment. "My gracious! He can't be in earnest!" Then, as the other nodded his head vigorously, he added: "I must see Ward and stop that talk. The Legislature! Whew! I'd rather fight a mad dog any day than to tackle the politicians."

Joe leaned back in the buggy and enjoyed a laugh that caused the loafers on the bench to drop the tariff and imperialism for a moment and stare at the trio,

"Bob, you can't live in Indiana and escape politics any more than you can live in Klondike and escape frost-bites. You can guard all you please against either, but some day you'll find they've got you."

"But I am not fitted for the place. Besides, what has strangling a mad dog got to do with politics?" Wayne was a trifle indignant.

"Oh, there ain't so *awful* much difference," remarked Hausman. "But I supposed you'd be pleased. That's the reason I told you. A man who can paint things with his jaw-bone like you can ought to make a stem-winder in a campaign. Been expecting to see you on the stump this fall."

"Sorry to disappoint you, but that is one Hoosier trait that I am trying to steer clear of."

"Well, all right; every one has a right to choose his own barnyard, as the fox said to the hawk, but you'll be mighty lonesome-like if you don't get into a few caucuses and help down the other fellows' underhand game —"

"And assist in the triumph of some plan equally vicious," broke in the preacher.

"All right, Parson, I won't argue the point. A man that'll fight a mad dog for the sake of a kid has my best opinion even if he won't talk politics. Tyler House is yours any time you want to come in." Hausman gripped his hand once more, gave him a left-handed slap on the shoulder, and turned away.

"Old Jake's true blue, all right," said Joe, as

they drove down the street, and Wayne confessed to a warm regard for the jolly hotel man.

Timothy Craig was making the anvil ring when they tied their horse and entered his shop. He greeted them cordially, and apologized for not being able to shake hands on account of his "dirty paws," as he expressed it.

"You fellows have been kind o' scarce since harvest began. So has everybody else, for that matter, and the old town's been dead. I haven't done much but work on puzzle pictures."

"Ever locate those fellows that were on the hunt for the pirates' treasure?" asked Joe.

"No, sir, dinged if I could do it. Don't believe they were in the picture at all. The *Sun* printed the dog-gonedest one last week. Had to find six sheep, four turkeys, three cows, a dog, two cats, and a pair of lovers. It was entitled, 'Home, Sweet Home.' Bess and I found a whole barnyard full of live stock, but we can't locate the lovers. I expect they're in the house with the blinds pulled down."

The blacksmith chuckled as he dipped a red-hot horseshoe into the cooling tub and then tossed it over near the door. Just at that moment a figure appeared in the doorway, but dodged back as the shoe fell with a clatter close to him. An instant later he peered cautiously around the door-casing, and the smiling face of Paragraph was recognized.

"Look here, Tim, don't be so lavish in your bouquet-throwing, please. Had it not been for my

great agility that emblem of good luck would have made a ringer on one of my shins. I appreciate the delicate compliment — but don't do it again."

"All right, Miller, come in. I want to see if you can find a pair of lovers in this puzzle picture," and he took a piece of paper out of a niche in the brick fireplace.

The reporter came in and shook hands all around, but looked rather helplessly at the picture which Craig thrust into his hand.

"Tim, I couldn't find anything in a puzzle picture if it was outlined in red ink, and, besides, I don't think it is right to hunt for lovers. Let the Parson try it. My observation is that a preacher can locate lovers as easily as he can spot a yellow-legged chicken just right to fry. Both are his legitimate prey."

"Then beware, young man, lest you fall a victim," said Joe, laughing.

"Oh, I'm not afraid. I'm as willing as an office-seeker. But I am chock full of business to-day and have no time for these idle discussions."

"Why, I thought you were a gentleman of leisure, Miller," said Wayne.

"Now, Parson, let me tell you that in my opinion no *gentleman* ever has much leisure. There is always something to occupy the time of him who has ambition, and without ambition no one can be a gentleman; without ambition the hinges of the heart's door corrode and refuse to open, the natural impulses for good mold and rot for lack of

nourishment, and the man becomes a mere figure-head, harmless, perhaps, in one sense, but falling far short of being a gentleman."

"Good!" exclaimed the preacher. "You have presented the question in a new light, and I am ready to espouse your view. Henceforth, I'll not speak of gentlemen of leisure, but, rather, of men who do nothing. But what is the nature of the business with which you are filled this day?"

"Only business I could be interested in — newspaper business. Gentlemen, hear me!" He paused and looked solemnly about as if to make sure that he had the undivided attention of all, and then, with his hat extended in his right hand, much after the manner of a patent medicine fakir, he continued: "I am about to launch in Craigville a great, free-spoken, untrammelled household weekly, a paper that will give all the news all the time, that will herald the weddings, note the births, chronicle the deaths; a paper that will champion no political party, but which will throw clubs at everything that menaces the best interests of this community — and the first club will be fired at this electric line subsidy."

"Are you in earnest, Paragraph?" asked Joe.

"You can gamble that I am. I lost out on the *Sun* because I had opinions that did not change hue in the presence of money, and those opinions will now be published in my own paper, the first issue of which will appear Saturday."

"Well, I'll be dinged if I don't wish you all the

good luck in the world, and there's my hand on it," exclaimed Timothy, and the others hastened to add their congratulations. "But, I say, Paragraph," added Timothy, as he walked back to the forge, "are you going to run any puzzle pictures? If you are I'll quit the *Sun* and subscribe right now."

"All right, I'll run them, then. I can get them from a plate house cheap. But I want something more than subscriptions; I want advertisements. You are in business here, Tim, let me run an ad. for you."

"Now look here, Miller, you're a good fellow and I am going to help you all I can with your paper, but I don't see any use of me putting an advertisement in the paper. Why, ding it all, every man in Willow township knows that I am ready to shoe his horse."

Paragraph looked deprecatingly at Joe and Wayne and then back to Craig, and shook his head as though saddened at some thought.

"That's just the way," he said, after giving his pantomime time to have the effect he desired. "Wherever a newspaper is born there must the advertising solicitor spend busy days and sleepless nights in missionary work, laboring to save the business men from decayed ideas, teaching them the gospel of progress and how to treble a success already achieved. The heathen (pardon the comparison, Tim) sits in the darkness of superstition and worships idols, firm in the belief that he has

no use for those things which are turning the world (his world) topsy-turvy, but at last there comes a day when he harks to the words of the missionary and is led, tottering, out into the dawn of better things. So the pioneer advertising solicitor in a community finds the situation. Those who are in business are satisfied to worship false idols, idols which tell them that the people of the community know that they have stores, and if they wish to buy they will come. You, my blacksmith friend, have beaten a living out of that anvil because people knew that they could get their horses shod here if they wanted to. *Now* — ” and he smote his left palm with his right as a vigorous bit of emphasis, “let us consider another view. The idea of an up-to-date advertisement is to create a want. You devote a little space to telling the people of the value of having a horse well shod at all times, and soon there will be less broken-hoofed horses in Willow township, because the farmers will see the point; remind them that it is prudent to keep their wagon-tires set properly, and there will be more wagons standing in front of your place; remind them of the little breaks in their plows, their cultivators, their binders, etc., remind them — ”

“Hold on, Paragraph, for heaven’s sake!” shouted Craig, grabbing up a pair of tongs and pretending to threaten the other with them. “You have *reminded* me, all right — reminded me of a small cyclone that dipped down in this neighborhood about ten years ago. Never saw so much wind

before that time, nor since that time until you lit in on advertising. Keep your mouth shut!" he shouted, raising the tongs as Miller parted his lips to speak. "Just you play oyster for a minute and give me a chance. I catch the drift of the lecture you just delivered, and I guess you're right about it. Fact of the matter is that I have thought over the subject before to-day and wished for a good newspaper for Craigville, but I wanted to josh you a bit before making any contract, but I'm sorry I started you. Just you put me down for a column advertisement, — and if you open your mouth on the subject again this afternoon I'll surely harm you."

Paragraph chuckled and bowed in mock humility as the smith concluded. Then he tiptoed to the door with his finger on his lips, and with a comical wink at Wayne and Joe he started up the street, whistling "On the Wabash."

"There's a chap that'll talk his way through the world if any one will," said Timothy, pumping the bellows vigorously.

"How's everybody up at the house?" asked Joe, awkwardly.

"Oh, Bess is all right," replied the blacksmith, ignoring the fact that there were others "up at the house."

Wayne laughed, and Joe blushed a fiery red and said he believed it was going to rain, notwithstanding the fact that there was not a cloud in the sky.

"Well, the air feels like rain to me, anyway," he

declared when Timothy called his attention to the fact that it scarcely ever rained in Indiana until there were a few clouds in sight.

"That just reminds me," said the blacksmith, "that the last time we were out to your house Bess borrowed an umbrella of Lorraine. I've been forgetting to send it back, and I expect Lorraine will want it. Now, if it wouldn't be too much trouble you might drive past on your way home and get it." He turned his back to Joe, but the preacher saw a smile playing about the lines of his honest, freckled face.

"Come to think of it, I — I believe Lorraine did say something about it. I'll just walk up to the house after it now." He paused and looked at Wayne. "Do you care to go along, Bob?"

"No, I'll stroll up-town and see you after a while," responded Wayne, conscious that he would be one too many "up at the house."

CHAPTER XI.

CHASING AN IDEA

THE preacher walked up the street and was greeted pleasantly on all sides. Children going home from school smiled at him, and one or two timidly spoke to him, and after he had passed a group of boys he overheard one recounting to the others how "that preacher had caught a mad dog with one hand and choked it to death, just laughing all the time, not scared a bit." The loafers on the hotel bench shouted a greeting to him across the street, and two men declared a truce in a political argument long enough to shake hands with him and say a few kind words. Then he realized that Hausman had spoken the truth when he declared that "the dog had outweighed the gypsy."

"Hey, there!" He heard a shout behind him, and, looking around, saw Bill Ward coming toward him.

"Been looking for you," said the marshal, as he gave his hand a squeeze. "Heard you were in town, and I've been searching the stores trying to find you."

"Well, I understand that you are persistent on

a search. I heard that you even drove out into the country a few days ago to find a man."

Ward shifted from one foot to the other uneasily, and a tinge of red became noticeable under the tan of his cheeks.

"Who told you anything about me going to the country?" he asked, after clearing his throat two or three times.

"Mr. Hausman."

"Well, that derved Dutchman is getting to be too much of an orator. Used to be he wouldn't speak five words at a time, but here lately his tongue's ball-bearing."

Wayne laughed at Ward's discomfiture. "Did you find your man?" he asked.

"Ask Doc Meyers. He went out the next day and put leeches on his eyes. You see I had a little discussion with the cur, and he stubbed his toe and fell down and hurt himself considerable about the face. But I think the swelling about his eyes will keep his tongue a little quieter." Ward grinned and glanced at a piece of court-plaster on one of his knuckles.

"I am sorry, Mr. Ward, if —"

"Now, Parson, you ain't got nothing to be sorry for, and neither have I. If any one's sorry it's the fellow with the leeches on his eyes. But that ain't what I stopped you about."

"All right. I'll drop the subject if you desire it. Now, what was it you wanted?"

Wayne felt reasonably certain of the marshal's

purpose, and was not surprised when Ward took him by the sleeve and led him over to a shade-tree, and after glancing around, said in a low, but emphatic, tone:

"Parson, you're going to the Legislature."

Notwithstanding the fact that he was expecting some such declaration, the emphatic directness of the statement rather embarrassed the preacher, and as he attempted to reply his tongue floundered and he found himself stammering like a schoolboy.

"That's all right, Mr. Wayne, that's all right," broke in Ward, misunderstanding his companion's confusion. "Of course you are surprised, but it's all right. I have started the ball to rolling, and it's beginning to make things rumble considerably already."

"But, Mr. Ward, as much as I appreciate your kindness, I must decline."

"What?"

"I say I must decline to run. I don't want to go to the Legislature."

"*Don't want to go to the Legislature?*"

Ward dropped his hands at his side, and stared incredulously at Wayne as he asked the question, unconsciously raising his voice in his amazement.

"Now, haven't I always said that the Parson was a *rara avis*?" asked a voice from behind, and Paragraph stepped up.

"Pardon me, gentlemen, for intruding on a private confab, but Mr. Ward here spoke a little louder than he intended, and my reporter's ears, trained

by years of practice in overhearing the exact things that were not intended for them, gathered in his words."

"Oh, it's all right, Miller," said Ward, "but I was surprised, and of course I spoke too loud."

"No wonder you were surprised. Parson, you must pardon his amazement. In Indiana a man who refuses an office is but seldom seen."

"Nevertheless, I must insist that I do not want to go to the Legislature. Nor do I want any other office."

"Well, no doubt we can find some patriot willing to place himself in the hands of his friends and take the nomination. The convention is next week, and if we are not content with those who have already announced their candidacy we will have to hustle."

"Oh, if Mr. Wayne won't have it, I am willing to let the other fellows fight it out," said the marshal, gloomily.

"So am I, for that matter," replied the reporter. "But don't look so forlorn, Ward. The Parson hasn't committed suicide."

"I am simply trying to keep myself in a position to retain the good-will of my friends," said Wayne, laughing at Ward's lugubrious shake of the head. "If I should break into the Legislature I would soon be an object of pity, I fear, because I am not schooled in politics."

"But you know men by looking at them, and could set 'em afire with your speeches. Dern it all,

we'd be proud of you, Parson." Ward concluded with an appealing tone, but the preacher shook his head.

"If I can read men I can also read myself, and I know that I can do more good right here in this community than I can by squabbling around the State House in Indianapolis."

The marshal sighed. "All right, it's all off, then," he said. Then he squared his shoulders. "Fine weather we're having, Miller." And by that token Wayne knew that the subject was buried, for when a man forsakes an argument on any subject for the weather, *finis* has been written to the argument.

Miller glanced at his watch. "Well, I must be going," he said. "Fact is, I'm in one of Jap Munson's hurries. Got to meet a type man down at the depot and give him an order for several new fonts. I calculate that when I turn loose on this subsidy business I will require lots of type with which to express myself."

"But look here, Paragraph, don't drive electric railways away from us. We need them, I think," and Ward looked troubled as he spoke.

"Ho! so you are stealing a ride on the subsidy band wagon, are you? Well, I haven't time to argue with you now, but I will later. In the meantime, don't you get any ideas into your head that we are going to have to pay for any line. There are people ready to put a line through here any

time they can get the right of way. Wayne, won't you walk down to the depot with me?"

They shook hands with Ward, and Wayne, noticing the sorrowful look on the marshal's countenance, gave his hand an extra pressure and flipped a joke that caused Ward to laugh heartily, and he was still chuckling when they left him.

"Coming out to Walnut Grove next Sunday to hear you preach," he called after the minister. "And say, give 'em fits on the subject of forgiveness. Guess I need some of it — the other fellow got his." Then he shouted: "In the eye."

A few loungers were sitting on the baggage-truck, and as Paragraph and the preacher approached, one of them averted his face until they had passed on into the waiting-room. As they entered they saw Jim Gordon standing at the ticket-window, his back to the door. Wayne caught Miller by the arm and paused. "Round trip to Riverside," they heard Gordon say, and as the agent pounded the pasteboard with his stamp Wayne quietly drew his companion back, and they walked down to the other end of the platform. As they did so Gordon came out with a sack in his hands and set it down by the side of the door. Then, after glancing sharply toward the truck, he strolled off to one side, and in a moment was joined by the man who had averted his face. The two talked earnestly, and once Gordon made a gesture toward the sack, but suddenly checked the motion as though he had caught himself in an error.

"Paragraph, who is that fellow talking to Gordon?"

Miller glanced at Wayne and half-smiled. "I don't know his name," he said, "but he is no friend of yours."

"Why, I never saw him before. How do you know that he is not my friend?"

"If you could get a closer view of his eyes, you would probably guess. He's the man that Ward — interviewed."

"Now another question. What do you know about Jim Gordon?"

"Nothing much, Parson. He was correspondent for the *Sun*, and I always thought he was a pretty good chap until —" He paused in evident embarrassment.

"Until what?"

"Until you came. Since then he's changed considerably, and I don't like the change. He hates you."

"Naturally. I got his clothes dirty."

"That is the least of it. Why, can't you see that he is crazy jealous of you?"

The preacher looked at his companion a moment, a flush dyeing his cheeks. "Of — of me?" he asked, awkwardly.

"Exactly. To speak plainly, he considered Lorraine Wilson almost the same as won until you came."

"And since I came — how has that affected matters? I am sure — that is, I mean —"

Paragraph laughed. "Never mind just what you mean, Parson. I know without you telling me. But it should be sufficient when I tell you that it *has* made a difference. Somehow she preferred to walk home from church when Gordon was there with his buggy. And once or twice he has stopped at the house while I was there and you were at work in the fields. I am sure that he was treated with perfect courtesy, but that was the gall. We treat strangers with courtesy; our dear friends we give courtesies warmed into an interest. Gordon is no fool, and he has dissected that courtesy and found stone."

The shriek of a whistle sounded near at hand and the black snout of a locomotive pushed its way around the hill, and in a moment the train came rattling up to the station. Gordon picked up his sack and got on the front end of the smoker. Paragraph met the type drummer and handed him his order.

"All aboard!" shouted the conductor, and a sudden thought flashed through Wayne's mind. He remembered of two men with a pick and a spade; he remembered of a rocky hillside with fresh dirt scattered around, and he wondered if in Gordon's sack there was — He broke the train of thought and rushed to Miller.

"Paragraph, I'm going to Riverside on this train. Find Joe and tell him I'll be back to-morrow. Tell him —" He made a dash and caught the rear of the last car as it passed. Then he made a trumpet

of his hands and shouted back: "Tell him I'm chasing an idea!"

He stood on the platform until the town had been carried into the distance by the rails, which seemed to be bearing the universe away from him with ever-increasing speed, and the last he saw of Paragraph he was standing in the middle of the track staring in amazement at the figure on the rear platform of the train. Then Wayne went in and sat down. "Gordon dissected the courtesy and found a stone." A feeling of elation swept over him. It was true that she had preferred to walk when Gordon was there with his buggy. A glow broke from his heart and flooded his soul.

"Tickets!"

Mechanically he handed the conductor a bill and then turned once more to his images. He saw her as she stood on the veranda, with the sunbeams dancing in her hair. He saw the clouds creeping closer; she smiled and he saw that they were gilded. The train became a chariot of hope, and he with a sceptre of love was in command, urging the unseen steeds to renewed efforts as they sped through Elysian fields.

"Where to?" The conductor's gruff voice was in his ear.

"To Lorraine — I mean to Riverside. And what time are we due there?" he asked, trying to cover his confusion. And then, not heeding the reply, he closed his eyes and wooed the ecstasy of waking dreams; but suddenly a mist arose, and as it slowly

faded away he saw before him a Cross. With a half-sob he clutched his hands together and turned his face toward the window, but the Cross was there also, shining radiant on the glass. Deep in his heart he heard a voice crying, "She is not for you! She is not for you!" and an agony gripped at his heart. But the Cross shone brighter and at last he reached forth one trembling hand and touched it. "Oh, God, Thy will be done," he breathed, and a peace came stealing into his soul.

"Riverside!" shouted the brakeman, and Wayne arose. He saw Gordon leaving the train, and in a moment was following him. He had boarded the train on a sudden impulse and now he questioned himself as to what he was to do. Playing detective was new business to him, but the sack slung over Gordon's shoulder was the loadstone that drew him on. He felt that a glimpse of the contents of that sack would give him a key to several things that were now mysteries. So he trusted blindly to luck and followed.

Gordon walked rapidly up the street, not looking to the rear once, and Wayne congratulated himself on the ease with which he was enabled to play his part. Presently he saw Gordon turn into a stairway, at the side of which was a small sign, "Johnson & Johnson, Attorneys." Wayne stood irresolute at the foot of the stairs a few minutes, trying to decide on some plan of action, when he was startled by a voice from behind:

"Were you looking for some one, Parson?"

He turned and saw Jim Gordon standing on the curb, a mocking smile on his lips. The preacher was thrown completely off his guard, and stared at Gordon without speaking, overwhelmed with amazement.

Gordon laughed derisively. "What's wrong? Don't take me for a ghost, do you?"

"No," responded Wayne, "but I'll admit that I am surprised. I thought —"

"Oh, I know. You thought you saw me go up that stairway, didn't you?"

"I do not deny it."

"Well, for your own peace of mind, I don't mind telling you that I did go up there a few moments ago — and then skipped down a back stairway and hustled around here in your rear."

"Very clever of you," replied Wayne in a dry tone.

"Thanks. I flattered myself that it was a neat trick, but such an acknowledgment from Reverend Wayne is certainly delightful."

"I don't think there is any need of this sparring. How did you know I was following you?"

"Simply by seeing you get off the train. I knew you could have only one object — to follow me."

"And why *should* I follow you?"

The shot struck home, and Gordon shifted uneasily on his feet. "Well, I don't know," he replied sullenly, "but I just thought so, and it seems that I guessed right. Now, if you want to see me, here I am."

"My business with you seems to be at an end. I am going up to see Johnson & Johnson." Wayne turned his back on Gordon and started up the stairway.

"Very well, I have a little business up there myself," said Gordon, following.

A man with a bald head and a hawk-like nose sat at a table littered with typewritten sheets and volumes bound in sheepskin. He was evidently nearsighted, for he held a book almost against his nose as he read. As the two men entered, he dropped the book, and, turning his chair in the direction of the door, blinked at them as though trying to force his eyes to do the work required of them.

"Well, I'm back again, Johnson," said Gordon.

"Um-m, yes, so I see — or, rather, so I hear, because my eyes fail me."

"Yes, I skipped out to find a friend of mine that I felt sure was looking for me. And, by the way, he says he wants to see you. Let me make you acquainted with the *Reverend* Mr. Wayne."

Johnson reached out his hand in a fumbling sort of a manner, much as a man would who was groping for something in the dark, and Wayne clasped it in acknowledgment.

"Want to see me, Mr. Wayne? Sit down." He set the example by wilting down into his big chair, and Wayne wondered if the chair had been made so large in order that there might be no danger of him missing it.

"I wish to speak to you concerning this electric

road business — that is, if you are connected with the project, as I believe you are.” This was purely a hazard on the preacher’s part.

“Merely as legal adviser, Mr. Wayne. If your business is of a different character I’ll have to refer you to Mr. John Ormand. He is in an adjoining room.” He pointed to a door marked “Private,” and then asked, “Shall I have you announced?”

The preacher glanced at Gordon. That young man was sitting with his chair tilted against the wall, a sneering smile on his lips. It was evident that he knew that Wayne was groping, and the realization that he was being jeered at spurred the preacher to a decision.

“If you please,” he replied.

Gordon’s chair came forward with a clatter, and he was on his feet in an instant. “Never mind,” he said, as Johnson was reaching to touch a bell. “I’ll notify Mr. Ormand for you.”

Gordon strode to the door, knocked with a peculiar play of the knuckles, and then opened it and disappeared for a time.

“You may come in,” he said, reappearing presently, and Wayne entered the room.

The promoter sat at a desk near the window, apparently deeply engrossed in the contents of a letter. He looked up as Wayne entered, and a smile, evidently forced, revealed a flash of gold in his teeth.

“Ah, an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Wayne,” he drawled. “Be seated — and I will beg your in-

dulgence for a moment while I finish reading this letter."

The preacher bowed and sat down without speaking. Gordon also took a seat, and there was silence for a time. The minister knew that he was being played with, that the others were indulging in mockery, doubtless in the hope of convincing him that he was making himself ridiculous in his rôle as a detective. The thought stung him. He glanced about the room and felt a thrill of satisfaction as he saw the sack which Gordon had carried lying near Ormand's desk. At that moment the promoter folded the letter and turned his chair facing his caller. He surveyed him a moment through his gold-rimmed glasses, and then said:

"I am at your service."

"I came to see *you*," replied Wayne. "My business is not with others."

He did not glance toward Gordon, but he fancied that the sneer had left his face. The promoter removed his eye-glasses and whirled them by the string a moment.

"Mr. Gordon, I believe he wishes you to withdraw," he said.

There was a smothered growl from the farmer as he went to the door. The two men were left alone, facing each other.

"Well?" said Ormand, after a moment of silence.

"I came here to talk to you about right of way

for your electric line. You claim to be desirous of purchasing private rights of the farmers."

"But I was not aware that you owned any land in Indiana," responded Ormand.

"Perhaps not; but if I represented another — Wilson for instance — what then?"

"Ah!" A quick light flashed into the promoter's eyes, but he recovered himself in a moment. "What are you driving at?" he asked.

"Business — first. What price are you prepared to offer for a strip of Wilson's land?"

"Well, I hardly know just yet. You see, this subsidy question must be settled first of all. By that time we can see our way clearer."

"And by that time you will know more about other things on the Wilson farm."

Ormand dropped his glasses, picked them up, and nervously wiped them. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"You will find my answer in that sack yonder."

"Now, surely you must be trying some joke. Why, that sack contains nothing that could affect a land sale."

"Then open it."

"Why, what difference —"

"Will you open it?"

"No, I won't."

"Then I will," and, with a quick spring, the preacher seized the sack and tore it open. Then he grew red in the face, for it contained nothing but potatoes.

Ormand laughed aloud. "What a peculiar fellow you are," he said, as Wayne dropped the sack with an exclamation of disappointment. "What could there be in those potatoes to so excite you? Gordon has a quantity for sale, and brought these to me as samples. Nice ones, aren't they?"

"All right, John Ormand — if that is your name to-day — I own to having been beaten temporarily. The next time I shall not be fooled by a trick."

"Indeed? But if you have finished your business I will open the door for you." Ormand arose and limped toward the door.

"Stop!"

The promoter hesitated, and then turned back. "I tell you I am through with you," he said, sullenly.

"But I am not through with you. This is a meeting that I have longed for — prayed for — and now you shall not dismiss me until you have answered to me."

"Again I ask you what you mean."

"A moment ago you asked that question, and I pointed you to that sack for your answer. But its contents had been changed. Now you again ask me what I mean, though in your treacherous heart you know well enough, and I point you to the past for your answer. Its contents cannot be changed."

The promoter turned to his chair and sank into it. He bit the end off a cigar and lighted it.

"Look here, Wayne, when are you going to let up on that question?"

"*When?* When the stain has been removed from the name of — from *her* name. When that has been done I shall turn from the past and pray God for a future."

"And what do you expect me to do?"

"Give that girl the protection of your name."

Ormand started to his feet. "You mean that I am —"

"I mean that you must acknowledge her as your wife."

"And suppose that I refuse?"

"Then there are those who will speedily learn that George Morse still lives — that the blackened body taken from the railroad wreck was that of a tramp."

"So you threaten, do you? Well, perhaps the Wilsons will not exactly approve of your past record." Wayne flinched, and the promoter pressed the point. "I dare say that the old man does not know that he is sheltering an escaped convict."

"I have my pardon." The preacher's voice was hoarse, and sounded deep in his throat.

"And perhaps if he should be told that this convict, this felon with the prison pallor scarcely out of his cheeks, had enticed his daughter into a lonely cabin in the woods, and —"

"*Damn you!*"

Wayne sprang at the man and his fingers closed about Ormand's throat until his words ended in a

splutter. Then he flung the choking, gasping fellow into his chair and stood before him, panting with the heat of his rage.

"So — so you show your colors at last, do you?" gasped the promoter. "You forget your ministerial cloak!"

"Yes, I did forget that I was a minister. I forgot all except that you are a cur, a traducer of women, a thing to be despised as the worm that wriggles in putridness, and that I was a man. And if you know a prayer, ask God to help me to not forget again."

"And why?" Ormand glanced toward the door as though expecting some one.

"Because if I should forget again, *she* would be a widow."

Ormand's face grew ashy, and he shrank back toward the window.

"You mean that you would murder me?" he asked, huskily.

"I mean that I could laugh on the scaffold knowing that I had avenged her."

"And what do you hope to gain if I say to the world that she is my wife?"

"What do I gain? My peace with God."

There was a rattle at the door and Jim Gordon entered. He looked sharply at the promoter. "Did you call me?" he asked.

"You know he did not," said Wayne. "But it is just as well that you came. I am going now, and this man may wish some assistance. He isn't

feeling well." He brushed past Gordon into the outer office, where Johnson was fumbling among the papers. As he reached the hall door he turned, with his hand on the knob. "And, Gordon," he called, "don't forget what I told you in the woods — that the next time I found that thistle in my path I should crush it. I consider liars thistles."

He passed down the stairway and out into the street. The shadows of evening were lengthening and the electric lights were beginning to splutter on the street corners. The shrill cry of the newsboys and the warning clang of the street-car gong came to him. A blind man sat on the curb playing rag-time tunes on a cracked fiddle, while a little boy stood at his side and sang jumbled songs. Suddenly the sweep of the bow stopped a moment, and then the fiddle began breathing notes of softened melody, notes like the sighing of the winds among the magnolias, and the voice of the boy arose in tones of childish sweetness:

"Way down upon the Suwanee River,
Far, far away."

The preacher felt a moisture in his eyes. He drew a coin from his pocket and a tear splashed upon it as he dropped it into the cup held by the child.

He passed on. Heavy wagons rattled over the pavements and an occasional automobile whizzed by. A street fakir stood in a buggy on a corner and harangued the crowd that had gathered, of-

fering for sale cheap jewelry. As often as his crowd thinned out he quickly recruited it again by laying aside his wares and making a political speech, which he skilfully turned into an argument as to why they should not fail to take advantage of his generous offer. There was a warning shout from the crowd in the street and Wayne turned in time to see a man pushing a banana cart dodge out of the way of a spirited team. The peddler turned to shout a malediction at the driver and the preacher looked full into the swarthy face. It was the gypsy.

CHAPTER XII.

DAVE DICKSON, ATTORNEY

PARAGRAPH was busily engaged in preparing the first issue of his new paper, but he found time to make flying visits to the Wilson place, and the preacher always felt a wave of good cheer creep over him when the young editor was by his side. He was so vivacious, so blithe, so filled with kindly good nature, that Joe declared that "Paragraph could make a thunderstorm appear like a Fourth of July jollification." But Wayne had gone deeper than the effervescent nature that Paragraph always put forth, and had found that the editor possessed a heart of gold, principles that were deep-rooted in honor, and a moral courage that would cause him to cling to and defend those principles, irrespective of the storms that might be directed at them.

"I am not cramming my opinions down any one's throat," he said to the preacher; "but they are my principles, my beliefs — and they are not for sale."

"But supposing you should lose your advertising patronage by refusing to advocate those things

which some business men might outline? What then?"

Paragraph whistled a bar of a merry little tune and threw a clod at a jay-bird that was noisily scolding in a near-by tree, before he replied:

"Well, Parson, if that happens I'll tie crêpe on my pencil and leave it sticking in a crack of the building as a sort of sepulchral warning to other newspaper men who may have opinions and ambitions. Then I will move. But I don't think that will happen. Advertisers don't take space as a charity proposition to the editor. If his opinions make the circulation increase, the advertisers want space."

The paper came out on Saturday morning, having been printed the evening before, and sample copies were sent broadcast over the county. *The Craigville Star* it was called, Paragraph having left the selection of a name to Susanna.

"Couldn't have made a happier selection," he said to her. "The sun is a prosaic affair shunned by poets; but a star! Ah, a star tunes the lutes of their fancy, and puts poesy on their tongues."

"Well, Will, if it puts anything on your tongue it will have to be when you're asleep, as it is in too much of a flutter at all other times."

Paragraph looked as though he had received a grievous stab, and Susanna slyly slipped her hand into his. He kissed the dainty fingers, and she ran away, laughing, while he went to look for Joe.

The editor had asked Wayne to contribute to the *Star*, and the preacher had promised him a column for each issue, a column entitled "Heart to Heart," and containing discussions of affairs of every-day life and a plea for a broader Christianity. The column was received so favorably the first week that Wayne became convinced that a new field was opening to him, and that by his appeals through the *Star* he could instill the seed of righteousness into the hearts of those who would never be touched by any other means.

The county and township conventions were at hand, both set for the same day, and every one in the community, save the Dunkards, was in a flutter. Wayne was working in a field when a man drove up, tied his horse to the fence, and then climbed over and extended his hand.

"Dickson's my name — Dave Dickson. I'm from Riverside, and I'm after that legislative nomination next week."

Wayne shook hands with him, and somehow the manner of hand-clasp given him by Dickson impressed him favorably. It was hearty, with just the right amount of pressure, and with a suspicion of lingering in the release. The stranger was a man of probably thirty-eight years of age, of medium height and weight, rather sharp in features, with clear, blue-gray eyes, and with hair whose color was a hesitating compromise between a deep brown and a black.

"I understand," said Dickson, "that Willow

township has not yet chosen delegates, and as you may be named, it is my business as a politician to see you and enlist you in my cause if possible." He laughed easily as he concluded, as though he considered his business as a politician not exactly to his liking.

"I am not likely to be a delegate, Mr. Dickson, but I am glad to have felt your hand-shake, anyway," said Wayne, and then added, with a smile, "but you do not appear to take political duties seriously."

"Well, I'll tell you. I've had a little bit of ambition smoldering in my heart, and of course it would be an honor to represent Tyler County in the Legislature; but there are so many political tricksters swarming about that a fellow feels almost ashamed to get out and hustle for the place. He has to do the same things, or many of them, that the demagogues do, and he cannot help feeling his manhood shiver occasionally. Not that I am dishonest in my campaign, but I am always under suspicion, and that slices into a man's pride pretty deep. But if all honest men shrink away from the political cesspool there will be no hope of redeeming American politics."

"Well, Indiana is certainly a whirlpool of politics, whether it is a cesspool or not," replied Wayne. "I have been in the State only a short time, but I think that every second man I have met is after an office, or is putting his thumb into the

political pie some place. If he can't pull out a plum he will hang on and nibble at the crust."

Dickson leaned against the fence and kicked at a weed. "That's just it. That's just why a fellow who's earnest and honest, with clear-cut ambitions and ideas, hates to come out for an office. He dislikes to descend, even in appearances, to the level of the piemen. But Indiana shouldn't be condemned altogether for her political industriousness —"

"No," interposed Wayne, "political industriousness is all right; but when it comes to a political *industry*, it is all wrong."

"Quite so; very cleverly put. When politics is a business it speedily reaches the same basis as business — barter; but industriousness is to be commended. George Washington and a lot of heroes in rags won for us the privilege of politics. Without Bunker Hill, Valley Forge, and Yorktown we would not have the privilege of going to the polls and naming every man from the President down. Industriousness in politics is our safeguard, apathy the numbness that precedes death. We must be active in the interest of good government, or the political tricksters will steal it from us. But I haven't inquired your politics yet."

"My platform is composed of principles. I deny that any man has a moral right to swear allegiance to this or that party. Great questions are continually arising. The party whose platform assures the best solution of these questions, together with the

assurance of a continuation of those policies which rightly solved past questions, is the party entitled to the support of every man who remembers Yorktown."

"You're right, and you are not standing alone with those ideas. Thousands are throwing off party yokes and stepping out into the field of independence. The day when party bosses may decide a question their way and then crack the whip over the voter is passing. What has brought about this change? The press of America, — the great dailies of our cities and the small weeklies of our country towns. They *feel* the public's sentiments, and they reflect these views in their columns. Not only that, but they are on the watch continually for rascality of all kinds, and the selfish schemes of the political Judas are dragged out and held up before the people, and the people can be trusted to make no mistakes when they are in possession of all the facts. In a word, the press of our country is at once a detective bureau and a schoolroom."

"If you carry those ideas into the Legislature with you in case of your election, you'll be the despair of the lobbyists."

"The lobbyists? Bah! The disciples of corruption! There may be exceptions, but the rule must be considered. But, pardon me, I have not yet learned your name."

"Wayne — Bob Wayne, of Willow township," replied the preacher, imitating Dickson's method of self-introduction.

Dickson looked hard at him a moment, stuffed his hands deep into his pockets, and indulged in a long-drawn whistle.

"Well, I'll be — say, is this Major Wilson's place?" he asked, still staring at Wayne.

"Why, yes, but what of it?"

Dickson laughed again in his easy way. "And you are Reverend Wayne?" he asked, ignoring the other's query.

"I am a minister; but again I ask, what of it?"

"Simply that I did not know until this moment that I was electioneering one of my opponents for the nomination." A merry peal of laughter ended the sentence. "That's a hot one on me," he added.

"Your opponent?" asked Wayne, puzzled.

"Why, sure! They told me over at Craigville that you would be on the floor of the convention as a dark horse, and they told me confidentially that you would be able to trot me a merry race."

It was the preacher's time to laugh. "That is all a mistake, Mr. Dickson. Bill Ward started it, but —"

"Yes, I know it was Bill Ward, and I know why he did it, too. Gratitude. I heard all about it — that dog affair, I mean."

"Well, that doesn't entitle me to political favors."

"Anyway, it entitles you to the firmest friendship I can give you. The defeat will bear no sting if you are the victor."

"But I am not a candidate."

"Don't be hasty in your decision, Mr. Wayne. They're red-hot for you in this section, and my honest opinion is that shrewd management on convention day and a bit of eloquence in the nominating speech would give you the nomination."

"If you don't mind, I'd like to shake hands with you again, Mr. Dickson. When I first felt your palm I called you an honest man. You have more than vindicated my judgment by that speech." The two men stood with clasped hands for a moment, and then Wayne added: "But, aside from my own inclinations, it is impossible for me to be a candidate."

"And why?"

"Because I have not been in the State long enough. I told Ward I would not accept the nomination, but I overlooked the fact that I was not eligible."

"All of the others seem to have overlooked it also," said Dickson.

"Probably they do not know it. Not many have ever inquired whence I came here. But I had not been in the State two days until I came to this township."

"Then I feel certain of the nomination. It was this Reverend Wayne of whom I was hearing that made me uneasy. A dark horse in a convention is a dangerous animal."

He climbed back over the fence and untied his horse. "Well, any time you need a friend just hunt up Dave Dickson. You won't have hard work find-

ing me. Most people in Riverside know me. I'm a kind of a lawyer."

Wayne thanked him, and the attorney drove away after promising to come out to Walnut Grove Church some Sunday. That evening, when the preacher returned to the house, he found Joe at the pump trough devoting an unusual amount of soap to his brown hands, and then he stood for some minutes before a small mirror, hung from a nail on the side of the wood-house, combing his hair. He appeared somewhat nervous, and dropped the comb twice during the operation. Wayne was about to ask the cause of this unusual behavior when there came a merry peal of girlish laughter from the house, and a deep red overcame the brown in Joe's face.

"Company for supper, Bob," he said, rather awkwardly.

"It may be unministerial, but I'll wager I can guess who it is."

"Then I'll save your dignity by telling who it is. It's Bess Craig."

"I knew it."

"I'd like to know how."

"Oh, just 'cause, as we used to say when we were boys."

Joe gave his hair another twist, and then dusted his clothes with his hand. "She brought Lorraine's umbrella back," he said.

"I thought you went up to the house after it

when we were in Craigville the last time," said Wayne, in apparent surprise.

"Well, I forgot it, because — because — Oh, confound it, Bob, don't devil me so!"

The preacher laughed, but his mirth quickly subsided, for in the doorway stood Lorraine Wilson, and a moment later Bess Craig joined her. They came out to the pump, and, as Wayne shook hands with the visitor, he felt that his self-possession was no better than Joe's.

"This is the first time we have met since the Fourth of July — that terrible day — in Craigville, Mr. Wayne," said Bess, and he lightly responded that a farm-hand had but little time for social affairs.

"But I cannot understand why you should choose to be a farm-hand. Of course if you had an interest in the farm, I mean as part owner, it would be different." This last was added with an apologetic glance toward Joe, who immediately mussed up his carefully brushed hair by raking his fingers through it in a nervous manner.

"Oh, it's not necessary to apologize to me," he said. "I know that Bob was born to better things than farming."

"Not better things, Joe," she responded, "but to more remunerative callings than that of a hired hand on a farm. But I now feel that I owe Mr. Wayne the apology for my impertinence."

"I do not consider it such," said Wayne, "because I understand and appreciate the spirit that

prompted your words." He did not glance at Lorraine, but looked away toward the woods and the fields and the sunset as he added, more slowly: "It isn't always money that rules men. Sometimes it is duty. I came here, perhaps by accident, perhaps by some plan of that mysterious something which men call Providence. Anyway, I found a duty I could not forsake — no, not for the gold of the universe."

His voice had softened, but his tone was one of intense earnestness, for his soul had spoken in his words. He turned again to the group, and saw that Lorraine was standing with clasped hands, her eyes beaming with — was it gratitude?

"Bully for you, Bob!" It was Joe's impulsive voice, and Joe's hand gripped his shoulder as a further testimonial.

Bess Craig smiled approval. "It is such men as you who keep our faith in God unshaken," she said, and Wayne bowed.

"I thank you," he said, simply.

Lorraine went to the kitchen, where her mother was busying herself, absolutely refusing to yield her post to another. The mothers of the generation passing took pride in the attainments they displayed to such advantage in the kitchen; the mothers of the coming generations may prefer fancy work and clubs. The Major had, on several occasions, suggested that the culinary affairs be turned over to another, but, beyond having Susanna assist her, the good lady rebelled.

"No stranger in my kitchen," she said, and there wasn't.

After Lorraine had gone, Wayne excused himself and went to his room, leaving Joe and Bess together. The evening shadows were lengthening, and a turtle-dove, somewhere in the near-by woodlands, was sounding its mournful vesper-notes. The merry whistle of the chore-boy was heard in the barn lot, and the tonk-a-tonk of the cow-bells sounded as the leaders of the herd came poking up the lane. Joe parted his lips to speak, but there was no sound, so he raked his fingers through his hair again.

"Aren't you glad to see me, Joe?" she asked, shyly.

He drew himself erect, and, conscious that he was towering above her in his superior bulk and strength, he resolved to use his tongue. Several pretty speeches flashed through his mind, but his reply was:

"Yes."

"Well, then, I think you might say so, and when I ask you the straight question you might say more than a simple 'yes.'"

"Oh, I don't know," he replied. "That word 'yes' means happiness sometimes."

She blushed, and said she thought she had better go in and help Lorraine.

"No, don't," he said, gently taking her hand as she was turning toward the house. "Let's go

around to the hammock. I want to tell you a story."

Her hand rested a moment in his, and then she withdrew it and turned toward the lawn. He spread the hammock for her, and she half-reclined in its embrace. A nasturtium vine, rioting with brilliant colorings, clung to the latticework close by, and he plucked a number of the flowers and, holding high his hands, winnowed them through his fingers into her lap.

"A tribute to the Queen of Summer," he said, seating himself in the rustic.

She laughed merrily. "Rather late in the season for the arrival of a summer queen, is it not?" she asked.

"With you on the throne all seasons are glorious summer." He was amazed that his tongue should not stumble and become paralyzed.

"My present position makes it impossible for me to courtesy to you, but you certainly are entitled to my thanks. You must have learned pretty speeches in the same school with Paragraph." She tucked a cluster of the flowers in her hair.

"If Paragraph has walked alone under the stars and learned his lesson by the throb of his heart, then he and I have attended the same school. Perhaps he recites better than I, but his schooling is no more thorough." The rustic sat at right angles with the hammock, and, as Joe spoke, he leaned toward her, resting one elbow on the arm of the seat, his head on his hand, while his rough work-hat

was thrashed about with the other hand as emphasis to his unusual speech.

"Why, Joe," she exclaimed, "are you a poet, and is this some bit of blank verse you are reciting?" She toyed with the flowers in her lap, and the brilliance of the bloom was in her eyes.

"If the man who feels a great love sweeping him on to happiness or despair is a poet, and if the yearning of a human heart simply told is verse, then I say yes." He was on his feet, his hat clutched and twisted in both hands. "Bess — I —"

"Oh, yes," she said, with a nervous laugh, "you were going to tell me a story, weren't you?" She realized that she stood at the threshold of that supreme moment of a human life, — the moment of betrothal, — but with the curious perversity of a woman's nature that causes her to endeavor to dodge the very happiness her soul hungers for, she was trying to postpone the climax to a most delightful situation.

He checked the speech that trembled on his lips, and the hat was slowly brought out of its tortured condition. "Yes," he said, his tongue once more in a palsied condition, "I — I — believe I was, wasn't I?"

"Well," she said, toying with the flowers, "I am listening."

He sat down once more and plowed his fingers through his hair. "I see you are," he replied. "That's the easiest part of it. But I'll try. Once upon a time —"

She clapped her hands like a child. "Oh, goody!" she exclaimed. "Now I know it's going to be a good story. They always are when they begin 'Once upon a time.'"

"I hope you'll like it, for I never told it before, Bess, and if you don't like it I'll never tell it again." His voice trembled a little, but she said nothing, and he continued: "Once upon a time there lived a big hulk of a fellow who was a dreamer, and who did not seem to amount to much in the world. He lived in a world of corn-stalks and wheat-straws, and called it dreary. It was just such a community as this, and the fellow was just about my size. Then, one day, a fairy princess came riding by on a sunbeam, — a princess with rosy cheeks and — and — well, she looked just like — you, Bess."

"Oh, how nice! And of course the fairy princess became in dire distress, and the dreamer by great daring rescued her."

"No, confound it!" he exclaimed. "That's where the story gets weak. The fairy knew no trouble, but was blithe as the sunshine always. The dull old community brightened after that, but the dreamer only dreamed the more, and in his dreams he built castles, and each castle he built contained the beautiful fairy as its queen. But the dreamer had a terrible enemy —"

She looked up, a startled expression in her eyes. "An enemy?" she asked.

"Yes; a great, dark fellow, who clung to the

dreamer's heels like a shadow. He was known as the Giant Doubt, or Faint Heart, sometimes, and, as often as the castles were builded, this terrible giant would tear them down and leave the dreamer trembling amid the ruins of the hope he had entertained."

"Why did not the fairy slay this terrible giant for the dreamer?" she asked, softly. Then she added, rather hastily, "You know that in story-books this always takes place."

He sprang from the rustic once more and stood before her, but his hat was gone. It lay on the ground, and was crushed beneath his feet.

"That's why I am telling this story," he said, eagerly. "Bess, you are that fairy and I the dreamer. I have builded those castles and always you were there to make them home, but that Giant Doubt has called me a fool and has destroyed my castles. He says that a rough fellow like me must not expect a fairy—I mean you, Bess—to—love him. But a man can't control his heart, and I love you. Don't answer, for I know that you will laugh at me. Yes, *do* answer, for I have been haunted by this giant long enough. Is he right, Bess? Am I a fool to—"

"Hello!"

Joe had stepped forward and clasped both of her hands in his, crushing the flowers she held as he did so, but now he dropped them as if he had been stung, and turned toward the road. Jap Munson stood leaning on the fence, his black-

snake dangling in one hand. Joe picked up his hat and brushed the dirt from it. Then he looked toward Munson, and there was no welcome in his eyes.

"Well?" he said, harshly.

"See anything of my brindle cow?" queried Munson, without changing his attitude.

"No."

"Didn't know but you had. She got out of pasture this afternoon, and I'm on her trail. Where's the Parson?"

"In the house." Then Joe recovered himself and added more civilly, "Won't you come in?"

"Nope, can't do it. I'm in a rush to find that pesky cow. Say, did you ever notice a cow's tricks? You hunt 'em for a day and don't find a hair. Then you give it up, set down and bat your eyes a couple of times, and what do you see? The cow. Yes, sir, the cow'll be standin' right in front of you chewin' her cud like a floater wallerin' a hunk of fine-cut in his mouth when you buy his vote." He flicked the whip-lash at a leaf, and then jumped the fence. "Believe I'll try battin' my eyes," he said. "Want to see the Parson, anyway." He shook hands with Joe and Bess, and asked the girl if she had heard any political news. At that moment Lorraine came out and called them to supper. Munson went to the house with them, and sat in an adjoining room during the meal, refusing to join them at the table.

"I'm in a rush," he said, "but I just thought

I'd drop in and bat my eyes a couple of times and then look for that brindle again."

But he remained until long after supper, and the crime of '73 was dangled before their eyes many times. He was full of the coming convention, and declared that he had the nomination as good as won.

"Just plain hustle did it," he said. "Just plain hustle. I showed the voters that hard times was a-comin' and that I was the man to take care of them in their hours of adversity. Even Hiram Owens has been lookin' at that line fence of his kind o' mournful like. He sees the dark day a-comin', but he ain't ready to give in yet." He arose and went to the door. "Well, I declare! It's plumb dark," he said. "I'm in a rush to find that cow. Batted my eyes a couple of times and it got dark, and I suppose the brindle's given me the slip. Well, so long. I'll take out across the fields for home. All of you come over." He went out, and a moment later they heard him calling from the gate: "I hear a cow-bell down the road a piece, and I'll bet a dollar it's the brindle. They always show up when you set down and bat your eyes a couple of times." They heard his blacksnake pop, and then he was gone, leaving them laughing heartily.

Joe had already gone into the parlor, whither Lorraine and Bess had fled to escape '73's melancholy history. Wayne and the others followed,

and evening's home pleasures were enjoyed as they can be enjoyed only in an Indiana farm home.

Lorraine touched a few chords on the organ, and then saying that she would pay tribute to the preacher's memories, she sang "The Suwanee River." Wayne had picked up a book and was idly turning the leaves during the song. She was right. The old, sweet song did awaken memories, but, curiously enough, they were not images of the Southland that came to him, but he saw the crowded streets of a Northern city, he heard the clang of the street-cars, he heard the rattle of trucks on the pavement, and then he heard a cracked fiddle breathing in a pathetic strain the old refrain, and the plaintive tremolo of a child's voice following the notes of the fiddle. The roar of the city's life died out and the little voice seemed singing to him alone, seemed pleading, pleading as it sang. The tones of the organ ceased, and Lorraine turned to him with a laughing demand for applause.

"Hand-clapping and cheers for any song but that," he said. "That is too sacred. It breathes of all that is good and true; it whispers of the sweetness of heaven and hints at the forgiveness of God; and sometimes — sometimes it pleads — pleads for something, I know not what."

"The sentiment of the South prompting the tongue of a naturalized Hoosier," she replied, and he laughed.

"Lorraine, you must not make light of Mr.

Wayne's words," said Mrs. Wilson, in her quiet way. "I think the sentiment does him honor."

"Bless you, mother, I had no intention of ridiculing him. It was so evidently the Southerner speaking that I could not overlook it."

"I think your words were well spoken, Robert," said the old man, "but I would like to ask where you find a basis in that song for your statement that it hints at the forgiveness of God."

"And I am afraid that I cannot make an intelligent explanation. Perhaps the figure was strained, but when I spoke I felt the basis. In the song the speaker is crying out his longing to return to his old home. A wanderer is sobbing for the scenes of his youth, and if it has been transgression that separated him from 'the old folks at home,' surely the plea of the song would indicate his repentance, and when one cries to God from a heart surcharged with the bitterness of lost happiness and the humility of repentance, I feel that it is a hint of God's forgiveness, for God looks into the heart and forgives. Man alone is unforgiving."

The old man sat with bowed head a moment, and the mother, with a look of — was it approval? — toward Wayne, stilled her rocker, and leaned over and murmured a few words to her husband. He raised his head.

"You may be right," he said.

"I am sure I am. We must judge man as God would judge him if we are to be just. If the Bible says God will forgive the repentant, shall man,

especially men who profess to hold God's word in reverence, remain deaf to the plea for forgiveness?"

The old man nodded slowly and deliberately. "You may be right," he said again. He arose, said good night, and left the room, followed by his wife.

Bess was seated at the organ, and now she sang one of the popular ballads of the day, and the ever attentive Joe stood by her side. Wayne again thumbed the leaves of the book. Then presently he paused. Buried deep in the book he had found an old photograph. He saw that it was the likeness of Lorraine. Then he looked close. It must be Lorraine, he told himself, and yet — it was different. Intangibly it was different. Lorraine's mouth was a cupid's bow, but the lips in the picture were almost straight. It *must* be Lorraine, he said. The same features were there, the same laughing expression of the eyes, the same delicately rounded chin. And yet — then he caught his breath, for the artist's name was on the card. It bore the name of a Florida city — and Lorraine had said that she had never been in Florida. He felt his temples throbbing. It was the old question. Why had she sought to deceive him? She had admitted knowing George Morse, and when she had learned of the promoter's presence in the neighborhood she had asked him to remain because of the flint in her father's nature. And here was her picture taken in Florida. And if her father

permitted her to remain at home why should she fear the flint in his nature? Was it possible that the father did not know all? The mystery was deeper than ever. The picture baffled him. It was at once Lorraine and yet not Lorraine. It slipped from his fingers, and as it fell to the floor the back of the card was up. He picked it up, and some dimly written lines caught his eye. Holding them closer to the light, he read:

“The storms of life may fiercely blow,
And sorrow in surging tides may flow,
But whatever may come, come joy, come woe,
May you retain this picture and a warm spot in your heart
for THE ORIGINAL.”

He heard a half-stifled cry, and saw Lorraine standing by his side, gazing with startled eyes on the picture. She took it from him, almost snatching it.

“Where did you get this?” she asked. And then she did a strange thing. She pressed the picture to her lips.

“I found it in this book,” he replied. “It must be you, and yet it is different. Was it lost?”

“Yes,” she said, excitedly. “Father burned the others and —” She paused in confusion. “I mean — that — he burned them — *accidentally*. I did not know that one escaped.” There was a suspicion of tears in her voice.

“And is it of yourself?” he asked.

She looked at him in indecision. “Why, I thought you knew,” she said.

He shook his head in a puzzled manner. "Thought I knew what? I am beginning to think that I do not know anything."

She turned and walked to the window. When she again faced him it was with a merry laugh. "Why, Mr. Wayne, I merely wanted to see if you recognized an old picture. Of course it is my picture. Isn't it a perfect likeness?"

"I don't know. One moment I thought it was, and the next moment I saw a difference."

"But please do not mention the picture, Mr. Wayne. I want to — surprise father — some day." Her voice had grown strangely earnest, considering the insignificance of the affair, so Wayne thought, but he made the promise readily.

The picture episode had escaped the notice of Joe and Bess Craig, for the young farmer had industriously turned music for her and had mixed it with provoking regularity. She stopped playing, and Joe bent over her and spoke earnestly in a low tone, his heart in his eyes. A flush was in her cheeks, and her fingers toyed nervously with the organ keys. He spoke again and her lips moved slightly, while the flush deepened.

"What's the meaning of those sly whispers?" called Lorraine, gaily, and the preacher smiled as he noted the nervous happiness apparent in Joe's manner.

"It means that the fairy has slain the giant," he replied, and then laughed at the look of wonderment that overspread his sister's face.

A thunder-storm had been creeping up during the evening, and now a sheet of rain was falling against the window. The conversation was in a strained vein, and at last the good-nights were spoken and the two men were left alone.

"Don't go yet, Bob," said Joe, as Wayne glanced at the clock. "I want to talk to you."

Wayne nodded his acquiescence, and for a few minutes there was silence, broken only by the distant rumble of the thunder and the moaning of the wind about the eaves of the house.

"Let's go out on the porch. The rain won't hit us there, and I want to watch the storm — it's too quiet in here." Joe arose as he spoke and flung open the door, and they stepped out. The wind stripped a handful of leaves from the trees and dashed them into the faces of the men who had braved the elements. Joe took Wayne by the arm, and they strode up and down the porch a few moments. Then Joe stopped and stood facing the preacher, both hands on his shoulders.

"Bob, she killed the giant," he said, and then one arm went about the shoulders of his friend and remained there with a pressure. Wayne clasped the free hand in his.

"You mean — what?" he asked, gently, suspecting the reply.

"I mean that I quit being a fool for a minute and asked her square out to be my wife, and she — Great God! Who's that?"

A brilliant flash of lightning had come. He

jerked his hand from Wayne and sprang to the porch-rail and stood peering out into the darkness in the direction of the road. The preacher was at his side in an instant.

"What do you mean, Joe? Speak quick!" he exclaimed, also staring out into that pall of blackness while the wind slapped him and the thunder rolled overhead.

"Bob, I'll swear I saw a woman when that flash came. She was out there — near the fence — in the road, I think." He had clutched the preacher's arm like a vise, while his other hand was extended out into the dark, and Wayne knew that he was pointing, though he could not see the hand. "She was standing still, facing us, and I saw the wind whip a cape about her head."

"You must be mistaken, Joe. It was a tree you saw. The lightning distorts. To-morrow —"

"No, to-night! I was not mistaken, and I intend proving it." With a bound he was over the porch rail and running towards the road. Wayne did not hesitate, but followed him closely. They reached the road, but the lesser flashes of lightning revealed nothing but a glimpse of storm-swept fields and road, fringed by dark masses of woodlands. They ran up and down the road, hands clasped and arms extended, but nothing came to the human drag-net. They knelt close to the ground, often in the hope of catching an outline against the horizon, but they saw nothing.

"It was about here," said Joe, "that I saw her

standing, motionless." They stooped again to catch the faint glow from the horizon.

"It must have been your imagination," said Wayne, but Joe said nothing. He took an old letter from his pocket, twisted it into a torch, and, shielding it from the wind by holding it under his coat, he touched a match to it. It flamed up, and he held the blaze close to the ground. Then he dropped the torch and picked up a bit of white that lay in the mud. He held it up in the dying gleam of the charred paper. It was a woman's handkerchief.

"Do imaginations carry handkerchiefs, Bob?" he asked, and his voice sounded hoarse to the preacher's ears.

"No," said Wayne. "You were right. Some one stood here, but a search is useless. Whoever it was can easily avoid us. Let us return to the house."

They retraced their steps in silence, unheeding the rain that now pelted them. In the lighted room Joe laid the handkerchief on a table and stood without a word. The find was a bit of cheap lace without a mark of any kind. The preacher shook his head after making a close examination.

"A handkerchief — and nothing more," he said.

Joe tucked the bedraggled article into his pocket, and glanced towards his father's room. Then he looked inquiringly at Wayne, and the latter understood.

"No," he said. "It would do no good to speak

of it. No matter who stood there, it is better that none save you and me should know."

They went up-stairs to bed. Both were silent, and Wayne fancied that Joe's footsteps were dragging and uncertain. The young farmer pressed his face against the window-pane a moment and then he turned with a heavy sigh.

"I'd give worlds to know who it is out there. One giant was slain to-night, but another now has me in his grasp."

How long Wayne slept he did not know, but when he awoke it was to find Joe absent from his side. The storm had increased in violence, and the crashes of thunder following the lightning's vivid frolics were almost constant. He turned his face towards the window, and by the lightning's play he saw Joe standing there, one arm against the sash, his head on his arm, peering silently out to where the rain splashed and the wind whined. The lightning gleamed again, and he saw that the man at the window was clutching a bit of lace.

CHAPTER XIII.

HALLOWE'EN

THE morning dawned in murk. Mists veiled the fields, and the trees arose out of the damp mantle like huge, sombre-hued spectres. At the earliest opportunity, Joe was out in the road searching, searching for he knew not what; searching for some sign, some clue to the one who had stood in front of the house during the storm of the night before, and as he searched a silent prayer welled up from his heart that he might find no clue. The new giant that had been born within him was clutching at his heart, and he trembled lest his search might be rewarded by unwelcome discoveries. But he could not resist the impulse to scour the roads and even the fields. At first, he had returned to the house after reaching the gate, determined to dismiss the subject from his mind, but he stood at the window looking out into the soggy waste of dreariness, and unconsciously his hand slipped into his pocket and clutched the bit of lace. He drew it forth and again inspected it carefully, but no clue was there. He returned it to his pocket and again stared out at the bleak land-

scape. It was calling him. He heard the silence of the mists speaking. "Perhaps!" "Perhaps!" was the plea that stole to him. He turned towards the road, and the bushes on its border beckoned sullenly. So he scanned the highway foot by foot, but no footprint was there. He plodded the fields, but no reward came. And when he turned again towards the house his soul was more at peace.

"A dreary morning," said the Major, as the men assembled at the barn.

"A bitter one for the homeless," responded Joe, and Wayne saw the old man's cheek grow suddenly white, but there was no response.

The secret of the hillside was appealing to the preacher, and, as there was no work to do that morning, he prepared to investigate. Joe was content to bask in the smiles of Bess Craig, propound riddles, and turn the music for her as she sat at the organ, and the preacher was enabled to slip away with pick and spade.

It was but a short walk to the hillside, and a hasty glance convinced him that no work had been done there since the night they had found the loose dirt. The hillside was rough, seamed with layers of rock, and where they had found the loose dirt the earth appeared to have been washed thin by the waters that trickled down from the crest of the hill when the rains came.

The mists had become fog, and he felt safe from observation by prying eyes. He sank his spade into the earth, and found that the rain had lightened

his labors considerably. In a few minutes he had reached a stratum of rock. He scraped the dirt away carefully and inspected the rock closely, but it gave him no story. He saw that it was jagged, and with his pick he chipped off a few pieces. He changed locations, and, after digging to the rock, he broke off other specimens. Then he replaced the dirt and returned to the house. He took his specimens to his room after washing them, and there he made careful inspection with a magnifying-glass, summoning all of his geological knowledge that the college had given him. At last an exclamation escaped him, and he bent closer to his work. Piece by piece he studied the rock, and a pleased smile began playing about his lips. The door had not been latched, and now it was suddenly thrown open and Joe stood behind him, but so absorbed was the preacher that the other's presence was not known.

"That tells it all!" he exclaimed, laying down the last piece.

"I suppose that I'm intruding, but I didn't know you were here, and I can't back away now," said Joe, and Wayne turned suddenly.

"Come on in," he said. "You are interested in this stuff." He pointed to the pieces of rock that lay before him.

Joe picked up a piece, and looked at it curiously. "And what is this stuff in which I am supposed to be interested?"

"Iron ore."

Joe stared at him incredulously. "Guess you're trying to joke me, Bob," he said.

"I was never more serious in my life. I know a little geology — just enough to tell me that there is iron in those rocks."

"But how does it concern me?"

"It came from this farm."

Joe was silent a moment. Then he picked up another piece and looked at it through the glass. "Well, I don't know any more than I did before I looked at it," he said, laying it down. "But no iron has ever been discovered in this section of the State, and I can scarcely believe it."

"Nevertheless, there is iron in those rocks. How much I do not know, nor have I any idea how extensive is the vein from which it came. But I know that it is these 'signs' that have excited —" He paused, undecided.

Joe looked his surprise. "Excited who?" he asked.

"Some you do not know, but one you do know — Jim Gordon."

"One day under a walnut-tree you wrapped the fog about me, Bob. The mists have settled down once more."

In a few words Wayne explained his suspicions that Ormand had a special motive in desiring to get right of way through the Wilson farm, but he did not explain that it was a midnight expedition that had first aroused his suspicions. This chapter he cleverly avoided, but he told of the thoughts that

had come to him the night they had found the dirt loose, and by telling him half the truth plausibly explained suspicioning Jim Gordon. Then he told of his sudden journey to Riverside, which he had taken in the belief that Gordon was carrying in the sack something taken from the hillside. He declared that while Gordon had detained him on the street and in the front office at Johnson & Johnson's the rock had been removed from the sack and the potatoes obtained by means of a rear stairway. "They have plotted to secure that land under pretense of securing electric line right of way," he said, in conclusion.

"Bob, it was a lucky day for us when you came to that walnut-tree," exclaimed Joe, enthusiastically. A burst of merry laughter came to them from the room below, and Wayne felt his face grow warm with the blood that surged through his veins.

"Perhaps," he said, and they sat in silence a moment. "If I knew that I could have but one prayer granted it would be that you should never recall those words," he added.

"Why, what's the trouble? You look solemn."

Wayne pointed out the window. "You see the mists. They are baffling, and when they creep into the heart they leave us — well, groping, unsteady, uncertain." Lorraine's voice arose again in merry jest, and the red blood stole once more to the preacher's cheeks. Joe noted it and smiled knowingly.

"Perhaps there is a giant shadowing you, also," he said.

Wayne was silent, and Joe leaned over and placed his hand affectionately on his shoulder. "Remember how I slew that giant," he said, looking into his eyes.

"You are kind, Joe — but you do not understand." He picked up a piece of the rock again. "I think we had better show this to your father in order that he may be on his guard against prospective buyers. It would also be well for him to have this assayed, and have experts look over the ground."

Later the old man listened to Wayne's disclosures, and said that he would see to having the rock assayed. In the meantime, none of his land would be sold.

The convention morning came, and Jap Munson was the busiest man in Willow Township. He was at the Wilson place early, nervous and excited, and demanding to know what was to become of the people when famine came to the land if the township trustee was not competent and had not studied the situation.

"If your flock needs spiritual food, Parson, point them to the Lord, but if their stomachs are empty and their toes cold, lead them to the trustee's office."

"Well, Munson, I am not a politician, and I have not been associated with your party, and therefore cannot render you any assistance in the convention,

but I sincerely hope that you will win the nomination and the election."

Munson bobbed his red head in acknowledgment. "That's nice of you, Parson. But in a case like this politics should be laid aside."

"No doubt you are right," said Wayne, smiling, "but I have not the power to shove it aside for you. It requires all of my persuasive abilities to keep men on the road to the better world. If I dabbled in politics I should soon lose what little prestige I now possess. A minister is a man, a mortal, of course, but when he steps from his pulpit into politics he is taking chances on losing the ground he has already gained for the welfare of men, with but little chance of accomplishing much good in the new field."

"Well, Parson, our objects are somewhat the same. It's a long journey you are starting men on; it's a short one I am trying to save them from. Heaven is far away, but the poorhouse is under our noses. When I look for the former my view is obstructed by the latter, and I see a sad-eyed procession tottering towards it always. But I'm in a rush," he said, suddenly springing to his feet. "I've got this nomination in a walk, but I've got to keep stepping along until I pass under the wire." He strode to the door and then turned again. "Found that old brindle down the road the other night, all right. Knew I would if I just set down and batted my eyes a few times."

"How is Mrs. Munson?" inquired Mrs. Wilson.

"Just fine, just *fine*. Hasn't taken a dose of medicine since supper-time last night. Elihu's rheumatism's worse — no, it's Johnny that's got the rheumatiz — no — yes — derved if — I beg pardon — I know which it is, but one of 'em is stiffer 'n a poker this morning. Well, I must rush along. I'll be back to-night with that nomination tucked in my inside pocket." He hurried away, and, climbing into his buggy, dashed down the road towards Craigville as though going to a fire.

He returned that evening in high spirits, and they knew by the scallop he cut in driving up to the house that he had the nomination "in his inside pocket." He fairly danced up to the porch.

"I'm it," he said, and then laughed as though he had voiced a witticism. They grasped his hand, and offered congratulations. "Yes, sir, I'm it," he repeated, smiling and bobbing his head more energetically than ever. "I'm the standard-bearer for Willow Township and I'm goin' to make 'em hump some, you bet."

"That's right, Jap," said Joe. "Make things buzz. Put an advertisement in the *Craigville Star*, 'Jasper Munson, Official Guide to the Poorhouse. If You Are Hungry See Me!'"

"There you go, Joe, making light of serious questions. I tell you I already hear the howl of the wolf, but I'm the man to wrestle with the brute in this township."

"My hearing is a little bad and I haven't heard his howl yet, but if I do I'll make a dive for you,

Jap. But tell us of the stirring incidents of the day, for I feel sure that a whirlwind campaigner like you must have created considerable of a ripple."

Jap pulled off his hat and scratched his head meditatively a moment. "Well," he said, after a pause, "things did get stirred up considerable like. Seemed like most of the intelligent people recognized that I was the chap for this wolf business, and I'd 'a' got it without a quiver if Hiram Owens hadn't got spiteful. You see, Owens hain't got over that fence argument yet, and he fit me tooth and toe-nail, but I got even with him. I called the people's attention to the time that Dunkard's smoke-house was relieved of a couple of hams and Owens's dog was found shut up there the next morning."

"Well, I should think that would stir things a little," suggested the preacher.

"Yes, somewhat," said the candidate, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Owens got ripping mad, and in front of the crowd he challenged me to a duel."

"Which, of course, you refused to accept," said Joe.

"Which, of course, I did accept," said Munson. "You see I've read all about duels, and I claimed the right to the choice of weapons, and told him that I'd meet him in fifteen minutes in the street in front of the Tyler House. He couldn't back out, and I suppose he thought the marshal would stop the affair anyhow, but I saw Bill Ward, and whispered in his ear, and he agreed that he had business

some place else." Munson leaned back against the house and chuckled.

Lorraine had come out and was listening to the recital. "You didn't hurt him, did you?" she asked, anxiously, and Munson chuckled again.

"Hurt him? Land sakes, no, Lorry! I was on hand at the minute and Owens was there, and so was a big crowd. I had gone to the harness shop and got two blacksnake whips, and I offered Owens his choice, the duel to be fought at five paces." His chuckle gave way to a paroxysm of laughter. "How that man did snort," he said, and then went off into another peal of laughter. "Said he had French blood in his veins, and such weapons were not fit for gentlemen. I popped the cracker pretty close to his ear and he nearly died. He busted out of that crowd like a rhinoceros, and the people swore that I was the man to scrap the wolf. And that was convention day in Craigville."

"And what's the news from Riverside? Who was nominated for representative?" asked Wayne, after acknowledging that Munson had had a stirring time.

"Dickson got there on the fifteenth ballot. Sam Sloan only got three votes for sheriff, and they all came from Willow Township. But I must rush along home. Expect wife's down in bed sick by this time. Oh, yes, I'm goin' to build a new barn, a whopper, and when I get it done I'm goin' to give a blow-out in it, sort of a barn-warmin'. Come

pretty near forgettin' to tell you about it I was in such a rush."

He drove away in the twilight, and as Wayne watched him he found a sort of envy creeping into his heart. He envied Munson his care-free nature, a nature that pretended pessimism, but lived optimism. Trouble slipped away from him always. His wife loved the gloom of an ailing life, and, as Jap had once told Joe confidentially, "she was never so happy as when she was miserable." But in spite of this, in spite of the "crime of '73," which he pressed to his bosom, he lived in the sunshine, always happy, always friendly. Wayne turned from his watch of Munson's retreating buggy and found Lorraine's eyes on him.

"It was rude of me to watch you so closely, Mr. Wayne," she said, smiling, "but while you were gazing at Mr. Munson I thought I detected a wistful look in your eyes, as if you would call him back for some purpose."

"You once declared that my Southern ancestry had declared itself in a bit of speech. I now state that your Yankee ancestry has stepped to the fore."

"You mean that I have been guessing?"

"Yes — and correctly. A Southerner knows a thing by intuition, the sense that is supposed to guide feminine creatures, but a Yankee has no such word as 'intuition' in his lexicon. He dissects a subject mercilessly, and when he has finished, sentiment has been slaughtered, but fact has been found. For want of a better designation he calls this proc-

ess 'guessing,' and this is why Yankee guesses are always called shrewd. His guess is a methodical deduction."

"In truth, Sir Critic, you have disarmed me by your play of words. I know not whether to bow as an humble fraud discovered or to tilt my chin in hauteur as the child of a superior people. You have dethroned our methods, but you have paid homage to the results."

"And, after all, it is results that count," he said. "For instance, let us consider my first sermon here, 'The Rose and the Thorn.' No matter how one receives the rose, if the prick of the thorn is felt, the wound will be as deep, whether it was given with intent or whether it was given in innocence."

"And all of this goes to prove that I was right in my guess, deduction, or what you will, concerning the wish your eyes bore as Mr. Munson drove away." She laughed merrily. "Did you want the crime of '73 brought out? I noticed that he forgot that heinous event."

"No, I can't say that I particularly wished for Jap's return. I hardly know how to express it, but I felt that I should like to be possessed of his buoyancy of character. He is firmly convinced that the poorhouse will have to be enlarged, but he can turn from the spectacle and live contented in the present."

"Perhaps that is because he has no past," she replied. "Contentment is as dependent upon the past as on the future, and as to-day will be the past

of to-morrow we must guard the present carefully, that contentment may be ours."

"Well, all of this is no doubt lost on Munson. He revels in politics, and the question of a past has, doubtless, never occurred to him, except as its record might affect his 'pull' with the party wheel horses. But even in political defeat he would be unruffled. The aches and pains of his flock do not torment him, but the flexibility of a new blacksnake is of the gravest importance. He talks of clouds, but lives in the sunshine."

The others had gone into the house, and Wayne and the girl stood alone on the porch. The delights of September were in the air, and though the breath of early fall was still balmy it was touched with invigoral. The meadows lay brown and cheerless, and the woodlands were already waving bare arms here and there.

"That means that school-days are at hand," she said, as a gust swept a bunch of leaves from a giant cottonwood close by. Wayne started suddenly. He had forgotten the approach of school, and now a tempest of thoughts flooded his brain.

"Then you will teach again this year?" he asked.

"Certainly," she replied, and there was a moment's silence. The preacher felt a sense of irritation. Why did she not say more? Why did she not declare that she dreaded the beginning of the term? Why should she leave her home from Monday until Friday? Then he realized that such thoughts were ridiculous. What did it matter to

him if she taught school and remained away? What right had he to question her affairs?

"And I suppose you will board at Gordon's again," he said, without looking at her.

"Perhaps," she said, after a moment.

"I should think it would be — would be convenient. It is close, you know."

"Yes, it is close, but I think I shall get a saddle-horse and board at home. I love to ride, and on bad days Joe can drive after me."

"Perhaps Jim Gordon would —"

"Mr. Wayne!" Her tone was sharp, and savored of anger.

He swept his hat from his head, and bowed to her. "I beg your pardon, I did not mean to be impertinent. I only — I only — that is — well, somehow I can't find the words I want, and I can only say that I am sorry."

She laughed gaily. "Oh, it's all right, I am sure. My tone was sharper than I intended. Mr. Gordon has been very kind to me — but Joe will come for me. You must excuse me now. I am sure mother needs me."

She entered the house, and Wayne stood looking at the brown fields with the unsightly shocks of drying corn-fodder showing dully here and there in the gathering gloom. There was an ache in his heart, not poignant, but dull and constant. He had made confessions to himself before, but now he was unable to name the cause of that steady ache. It was baffling, but it was there, and, with the gloom

of night settling in his heart, he felt again the impulse to flee from it all, to run away. Out there in the great world, which he knew was throbbing just beyond the horizon, there would be relief. What was he accomplishing here? He was simply waiting, waiting for he knew not what. In his heart he carried a love for Lorraine Wilson, a love that he had assisted in rendering hopeless. She did not guess his secret, of that he felt certain, and of that he was glad. To her he was a preacher, an employee of her father; an honored one, perhaps, but nothing more. It was all so dreary. The dusk deepened into night as he stood there, and from beyond the horizon the great world whispered to him to come. He turned and went to his room, intending to steal away, but in the darkness of the room a Cross seemed to glow white before him. He stood irresolute a moment, and then taking a small pipe from a drawer he filled and lighted it, and sat down with his back to the window that the world beyond the horizon might not tempt him again. And so Paragraph found him half an hour later when he had received "Come" in answer to his rap.

"Shades of Pluto!" exclaimed the editor, as he opened the door and found himself confronted by darkness. "Is this a game of 'Parson, Parson, where's the Parson?' And that dull glow doth also startle me. Reason falters at the ruddy speck, but (sniffing) my nostrils whisper that 'tis tobacco in process of cremation; tobacco, the plant that

made little Robby Reed famous in the school-books. But let me hear a voice from out this Plutonian darkness."

"All right, Paragraph, be not alarmed. Here's the voice, and now if you will strike a match you'll find that your nostrils are sagacious."

Miller fumbled in his pocket for a match, and then its tiny flame flared up.

"Here's the lamp," said Wayne. "Have a seat," he added, as Paragraph stood looking at him curiously.

"Guess I'm acting like a kid," replied the editor, taking the proffered chair, "but I'll own up to being surprised at seeing you smoking."

Wayne smiled. "My Episcopal moment is on me," he said.

"Well, you look comfortable and happy with that bit of brier, and (sniffing again) I congratulate you on your Episcopal choice of tobacco. That is good stuff."

"I use no other brand. It is a link that binds me to Florida. I know the factory where this is prepared; I know the men who do the work. Why, I can take three whiffs of it and name the plantation where it grew, and I can sing the songs the darkies droned while they were gathering it."

"Sort of an old acquaintance, is it?"

"Better — an old friend. Some friends chide; this one consoles."

"But I supposed you were opposed to smoking," said Paragraph.

"So I am, when it is harmful; but it is not harmful to me."

"But are you not encouraging a temptation for some weaker brother?"

"I'll admit that this question as to whether or not a man is his brother's keeper is puzzling as to degree. If you partake of corned beef and cabbage are you sinning because you dangle a temptation in front of a dyspeptic? I once read in a book of a fellow who called his pipe an altar on which he burned incense to memory. Mine is a funeral pyre on which I cremate the past."

"And what of the future?"

The preacher blew a whiff of smoke into the air and then waved his hand towards it. "Even as these curling smoke-wreaths. Hope gives us a glimpse, but it eludes our grasp."

"All right, Parson, I guess you're the kind of a fellow to make a Christian out of me. Susanna intimates occasionally that no one can ever lead me along the strait and narrow path, but she's wrong. Somehow, I never took up with those fellows who snooped around until they found a chap enjoying himself, and then declared that he was standing on the shore of the brimstone lake. Seems like all of the good things in life belong to old Mephistopheles, according to their view. Seems to me a fellow can believe in Christ and the Cross without locking himself in a cage."

"I think so myself. I feel the presence of God, but I am human and apt to err. Therefore, I can

only hope that those among whom I labor will imitate my virtues, if such I possess, and heed the lesson taught by my faults. Man is so frail and the God we worship so great that we can only struggle with clean hearts and right intentions to be found worthy. I can stand at the brink of the grave and offer supplication for the peace of the soul departed, but I am answered by faith alone. I shout into the tomb, the ear of eternity, but no answer comes back save that given to me in the Bible, and that I read with such wisdom and divining power as God has given to me, but my intellect is feeble as compared to the great questions that well up from the silence of the tomb.

“ ‘For what am I?
An infant crying in the night;
An infant crying for the light;
And with no language but a cry.’ ”

I stand in my humble pulpit and preach the love and fatherhood of God, but I shall not advocate a man-made creed, for all men are like myself, ‘infants crying in the night,’ and in Mark’s book we find Jesus saying, ‘Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.’ ”

“ When more men like you stand in the pulpits of our country, Parson, the building committees will have busy times enlarging the churches, for your doctrine appeals to the honest seeker. We have too much religion and not enough Christianity. Each religion declares that those who do not believe

its special dogmas shall be damned. It is as wise for Jap Munson to say that all who refuse to vote for free silver will be lost."

"But the intelligence of man is asserting itself and Christianity is triumphing over superstition," replied Wayne. "The press dispatches in the daily papers from time to time give to the world the information that this or that denomination is considering the proposition of revising its creed. The world is advancing out of darkness, and one by one the hideous barnacles are being torn from the Bible, until, some day, the ministers of God will face the world with one hand reaching down to uplift the faltering ones, and with no text-book of Christianity but the Bible in the other, and they shall say what the Bible says, not what superstition says."

The editor arose. "Guess I'd better be getting down-stairs," he said. "Susanna was busy and I thought I'd run up to see you a minute. Expect she's gone with a handsomer man by this time."

Wayne laughed. "No danger of that, Paragraph. She is destined to assist the *Star* in twinkling by becoming the helpmeet of its hustling editor." Then he added, apologetically, "No offense meant, my friend."

"Save your apologies, Parson. Didn't I tell you one day that I was as willing as an office-seeker? I've courted that fair maiden ever since I have been big enough to comb my own hair, and though the altar has several times appeared as close as Jap Munson's poorhouse, she has always side-tracked

before reaching there. But I am not discouraged, and shall live in the hope of finally tacking 'M-r-s.' before her name."

He went down the stairs and Wayne sat alone. His pipe was out, and he knocked the cold ashes from the bowl. Then he walked to the window and looked out. The sky was thickly studded with stars, and somewhere he heard the barking of a watch-dog. He remembered of that first night and his temptation to go away, and how an angel, in clinging robes of white with a sceptre of roses, had appeared in the moonlight and caused him to remain. And even so had the impulse to run away come to him the present night, and the Cross had appeared in the darkness to remind him of duty. He looked toward the horizon, and, though he knew the world was there throbbing, throbbing, it no longer called to him.

Down-stairs Paragraph found Susanna in the parlor alone, and, though she pretended to be deeply engrossed in a book, he knew by the deeper bloom in her cheeks that she had heard and recognized his step.

"Ah, delightful is the fate that gives me the pleasure of your society undivided," he said, and bowed low as she looked up with fine pretense of being startled.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she asked.

"Many times I fain would have denied that this personage was I, when creditors sought me with rows of figures on bits of paper, but standing in

the presence of thee, fair one, I feel that my tongue is utterly incapable of expressing the joy that surges o'er me at the thought that it is indeed I who have this great good fortune. Again and again I confess, I proclaim, I insist that this is I who stands before you hungering for one bright smile from lips that shame the ruby, for one fond glance from eyes that render the diamond lustreless in comparison."

The girl broke into a merry peal of laughter. "I had a scolding mapped out for you for staying up-stairs so long, but it would be useless to deliver the lecture. I would stand but a slim chance against a tongue like yours."

He sat down, and his chair appeared to creep closer and closer to where the girl sat rocking, the bloom still in her cheeks. The hour grew late, but the stilted speech flowed as readily as ever from the editor's tongue. He believed in romance in wooing, and when Susanna gently chided him for his many figures of speech, he replied that he wanted to show the world how a courtship should be conducted. He held Jap Munson before her laughing eyes, and declared the candidate to be an example of the prosaic.

"And now listen to Jap's word juggling," he said. He arose to his feet, swung his arm as though circling a blacksnake. "Pop! Back in '73 when silver was made the victim of an atrocious crime—you hear me; you *hear* me!" Then after a pause he asked: "And now, Blooming Rose, which

do you prefer, the stilts or the rut?" And (who could blame her?) she chose the stilts. But when he implored her to name the day when they should wed, she hesitated.

"But I need a queen for my home. Or, rather, I need a queen and a home, for Jake Hausman's hostelry is all that I can now call home. And think of the many subscriptions that would be mine could I but use loads of wood, barrels of potatoes and apples, and quarters of beef. That sounds prosaic, but even stilts need nails."

The clock in the adjoining room counted off a startling number of hours as Paragraph picked up his hat and started for the door. At the gate his horse stood stamping impatiently.

"Got that rig from the liveryman on subscription," he said.

She stood at the gate as he got into the buggy and gathered up the lines.

"Now no more postponements, Star Beam," he said. "On Hallowe'en we shall fly together."

"But, Will, I really do not see the need of an elopement."

"Sh-h-h! The stilts or the rut. Remember Jap Munson."

She promised not to forget the candidate's matrimonial experiences, and Paragraph drove away, and back to Susanna, standing at the gate wrapped in maiden dreams, there came floating:

"Oh, the moonlight's fair to-night along the Wabash."

The days crept by with nothing to disturb the serenity of life on the Wilson place. The Major had not yet sent the rock to be assayed. He was waiting, he said, for a move on the part of Ormand. The early frosts of October kissed the leaves into golden glory, and sent them in ever increasing numbers whirling towards the ground, to be caught up in the glee dance of the autumn wind and banked against the trees, the stumps, and the fence corners. Lorraine's school had begun the winter term, and each morning Joe drove away with her in the buggy, and each evening he went after her.

Wayne, returning from the fields one evening, found a strange buggy in front of the house, and as he approached he saw Jim Gordon standing at the gate with Lorraine. With head erect, the preacher walked on, but he had come up in the rear of Gordon, and it was evident that the latter was not aware of his approach as Wayne heard him raise his voice and say in sullen tone: "Well, it was all right until *he* came here. But you wouldn't have him about if you knew what I know. Ask him —"

Wayne saw Lorraine throw up her hand to silence Gordon, and the latter, hearing the preacher's step, scowled darkly at him as he lifted his hat with a slight bow and strode past, his brain a seething whirl.

"I must bid you good evening, Mr. Gordon," he heard the girl say, and a moment later he heard the sound of wheels and knew that Gordon had gone.

Jap Munson's barn neared completion, and one day Jap mounted one of his work-horses, and rode around over the neighborhood, inviting old and young to his barn-warming.

"Goin' to have it on Hallowe'en," he said. "The young folks always want to cut up high jinks on that night, and I'll just corral 'em in my barn and let 'em go it."

It was a gay company that assembled in the new structure that night. The neighborhood fiddler was there, and after much tuning and retuning of his instrument he would dash off galloping strains of simple melodies. He took offense once because some one referred to him as a "violinist." He declared that violinists were made, but that fiddlers were born.

"Don't want no prouder title than 'fiddler,'" he said. "My daddy before me fiddled, and when I was a toddler he'd make me corn-stalk fiddles. I'm a fiddler." Then, to show his proficiency, he tucked his instrument under his chin, and with a flourish set their feet to patting to the strains of "Money Musk."

Joe was there, the shadow of Bess Craig. Lorraine had gone over in the afternoon to help Mrs. Munson prepare for the event, and she intended remaining at Munson's that night. Jim Gordon had come early, and was acting to perfection the part of a jolly young farmer. Paragraph and Susanna were also there, and while the editor kept the fun moving by his inexhaustible supply of wit

and his ready declamation of bits of poetry, the girl sat shyly in a corner and blushed furiously whenever any of the neighborhood lasses attempted to tease her about "her fellow." Jap Munson, resplendent in a white shirt that showed the creases made by his wife's iron, was hopping about like a cricket, bobbing his red head and entreating everybody to tear down the barn if necessary in order to have a good time. To the surprise of all he banished politics. Multi-colored autumn leaves and gray corn-stalks, the latter with large ears pendent, were draped about the walls, while a dozen "pumpkin faces," with candles, grinned at the revelers from odd nooks and corners. Cider and apples, nuts and pop-corn, were there in lavish quantities, and no favors were pinned on to show that the guest had been once served with refreshments.

"All here, I guess, but the Parson," said Jap. "Where's Wayne?"

"Said he had to make a sick call and that he would be here later," replied Paragraph.

There were charades and songs, and then the fiddler mounted an improvised platform, made two or three flourishes, and ran the scale.

"Partners for a waltz!" he shouted, and then the bow cut another scallop and called forth the first strain of "Sweet Evalina."

Paragraph had sought Susanna's side. "We'll wait until the evening's half-gone and then we'll fly to the altar," he said. "We can get back here in time to announce the wedding to the crowd at

midnight. That's the time the weird things always happen." He gave her hand a surreptitious squeeze and left her without explaining whether or not he classed their prospective wedding as weird.

The strains of music became more vehement and the rough floor resounded with shuffling feet. A knock sounded, and Jap Munson danced excitedly to the door and opened it. Wayne stepped in.

"Guess you are lost at a dance, aren't you, Parson?" asked Paragraph.

The preacher laughed. "Not at all," he said. "The Methodist within me is horrified, but my Episcopal feet grow restless at waltz music." A moment later he was gliding through the measures of the dance with Bess Craig.

It was close to the midnight hour when Paragraph and Susanna, now Mrs. William Miller, were hastening back to the party at Munson's. A Craigville minister had been awakened from his slumbers and had spoken the service for them. It was a scant two miles to Munson's, and they had elected to walk the distance, taking a route that led across the fields and through the woods. The moon was hidden by a gray mass of clouds, but objects were readily distinguishable at short distances. Paragraph was rehearsing his announcement speech when Susanna suddenly clutched at his arm.

"Some one is coming," she whispered, and pointed ahead to where a shadowy figure was seen crossing an open space.

They drew back into the shadow of a clump of

bushes, and the man passed close by without detecting them.

"Jim Gordon," said Paragraph, when the other was past, and was about to continue the journey when he muttered an exclamation and shrank back again. Another man was coming. He passed in the same manner, and then the elopers left their concealment and hastened towards the Munson place.

"That last was the Parson. The party must be breaking up," he said. But when they neared Munson's the sound of the fiddle was heard, and it was evident that the revelry had not ceased.

Congratulations were showered on the bride and groom, and Paragraph declared that the elopement had been a grand success. "No irate parent pursued with loaded weapons," he said, "but it was a good enough elopement anyhow. We dodged the rut."

"Sorry the Parson ain't here to make a speech," said Munson, "but I guess he's gone." Then he led Paragraph aside, and, after looking cautiously around, said in a low tone: "Miller, the Parson and Jim Gordon are goin' to have trouble sure. Don't know what it's about, but it's comin'. Pretty near had a row to-night. Gordon started it, I think. The Parson had been talkin' to Lorry, and was just leavin' her when Gordon, who'd been a-watchin' 'em like a cat does a mouse, stepped up to Wayne and said something to him. Don't know what it was, but I saw the Parson get white around the lips

all at once. He whirled on Gordon, and then seemed to catch himself, for he turned his back and walked away."

The notes of the organ were heard, and the company united in singing a merry song of the season, a greeting to "the witching hour," but excited voices were heard without, and in a moment the door was flung open and a farmer boy rushed in, his face like ashes.

"Don't sing!" he shouted, and a sudden hush fell. "Don't sing! Jim Gordon's been murdered!"

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN THE BLOODHOUNDS CAME

THE boy's declaration that Jim Gordon had been murdered created wild excitement and dismay at the barn-party. Men crowded about the lad and pressed him for explanations, while white-faced women, horror in their eyes, hovered at the outside of the group. What had been a scene of revelry a few minutes before became now a place of awed memories. Gordon had been among them so recently, apparently as gay as the gayest, and now he had been ushered into eternity by the hand of an assassin.

The boy's story was brief. A party of coon hunters had found Gordon lying in the woods not far from his home. His face was ghastly and blood was oozing from a knife-wound in his side. There were signs of a struggle having taken place, but it was evident that the blow had soon ended it. The rest of the party had formed a rude litter and carried Gordon home, while the boy had hurried to Munson's to tell the news.

The guests stood about the barn discussing the tragedy in low tones. During the evening's pleas-

ures a number of autumn leaves had fallen from their places and now rustled under foot in an irritating way. The candles had burned low in the Jack-o'-lanterns, and some had sputtered and died out, leaving the pumpkin faces leering dismally at the murmuring groups, now fast dissolving.

Once Munson's eyes had met those of Paragraph squarely, and each read the terrible thoughts of the other. But through it all the candidate did not forget his duties as host, and he strove manfully to lighten the cloud that had settled over the assemblage. And now he found an opportunity to speak to the editor. Touching him on the arm, he led the way to a corner away from the remaining guests. He looked straight into the editor's eyes a moment.

"Look here, Miller," he said, "did you understand me to say that the Parson and Jim Gordon were going to have trouble?" His tone was freighted with earnestness, and one hand rested on Paragraph's shoulder, while their eyes met.

Miller shook his head. "I don't remember of you saying anything of the kind, Jap," he replied, slowly.

Munson grabbed the editor's hand and gripped it. "You're true blue," he said, huskily. "Some people would have misunderstood me. I didn't mention their names at all, and I don't remember just when they left here." He turned away and then came back. "Wait until the others have gone, and then we'll drive over to Gordon's," he added.

Paragraph had already cautioned his bride to say

nothing of what they had seen in the woods, and Susanna, bursting into tears, had vowed that no torture could wring from her a word that might weigh against Wayne. Lorraine had sat down, half-hidden by the organ, when the first news of the tragedy had come, and there she remained, dry-eyed, a deep pallor in her cheeks, replying in monosyllables to those who spoke to her. Now that they had all gone, Mrs. Munson came to her.

“Let’s go to the house, Lorry,” she said, and the girl arose without a word and followed her.

Munson put a horse to his buggy, and he and Paragraph started for Gordon’s, taking Susanna to the Wilson place on their way. They found lights flashing from the windows of the Gordon home, and in the yard lanterns were moving to and fro, showing that the countryside had been aroused by the bloody affair. They tied their horse to the fence and started up the walk, but a voice called to them and asked them to stop. Then a lantern flashed in their faces, and they saw that it was Bill Ward, the Craigville marshal.

“Don’t go too near the house just yet, boys,” said Ward, after shaking hands with them. “The doctor says it ain’t best to have confusion.”

“The doctor!” exclaimed Paragraph. “Why — why — what good — do you mean —”

“He’s still alive,” said Ward, ending the other’s confusion. “They thought he was gone, but he ain’t, though he’s precious near it.”

Munson clutched the editor by the arm, and gave

the limb a vise-like squeeze. "Any clue?" he asked, and held his breath while awaiting a reply.

"Not a one. They found him lying there — dead they thought — and that's all there is. I went all over the ground there on my hands and knees, but there was nothing to be found. I've sent to Riverside for bloodhounds, and in the morning I'll see if the dogs can do any good. I put guards around the spot so a crowd wouldn't spoil the trail."

"Um-m, yes," responded Munson, as though in deep thought. "Going to stay around here all night, Ward?"

"Thought I'd hang around until a little before daylight and see how Gordon comes on. The fellow that owns the dogs will drive through, and he can't reach Craigville much before sun-up. I promised I'd meet him there. When I go in I'll let the guards go to bed, for there won't be any one around at that hour to spoil the scent."

"Why, certainly not, certainly not," said Jap, with sudden alacrity. "No use keeping them chaps watchin' a bare piece of ground just for fun. I'll drive back home and tell the folks Gordon ain't dead. Maybe I'll be back before you leave. I'll want to know about Jim."

The farmers who had assembled when the news of the tragedy had been flashed around were now leaving for their homes, yawning because of being aroused at such an unusual hour. The night was chilly, but Ward drew his overcoat tight about him,

and alternately stamped up and down the yard or sat down on the door-sill of the barn.

"Let's take a drive," said Munson to the editor, and in silence they untied the horse and got into the buggy. They drove down the road at a slow trot.

Paragraph was the first to break the silence. "I wonder where—" He stopped in awkward confusion.

"You wonder where the Parson is?" queried Munson, and Miller murmured assent.

"I'm goin' past Wilson's," said Munson, "but I want you to stay with me awhile longer if you will."

"Count me in to the last." The occasion had a strangely quieting effect. Paragraph was no longer stilted, and Munson, the candidate, had given place to Munson, the deliberate.

"Whoa!" Munson suddenly tightened the lines, for a man had sprung over the fence into the road but a few feet ahead.

"It's Wayne," said Miller, bending forward and peering into the gloom.

The man in the road evidently heard the words. "Yes, it's I," he said. "That you, Paragraph? I just heard about Gordon and was cutting across the fields to his home. You've been there, I suppose. Tell me about it."

He listened attentively to the brief account. "I'll go on," he said. "If he is dying my place is at his bedside."

When they arrived at Munson's home Jap left

Paragraph in the buggy while he went into the house. In a short time he returned, and again got into the buggy.

"Let's go back and see Ward," he said. But few words were exchanged on the return trip. Paragraph had not told his companion of seeing Wayne close behind Gordon in the woods, and in his own mind he was battling against conclusions that were forced upon him by the facts.

They found Ward still stamping up and down the yard, but now he was alone. "The crowd all put to bed when they found Gordon was alive. I'm precious glad of it, though. Think I'll call in the guards and let them get some sleep, too." He yawned as though he would be pleased to go to bed himself.

"Is he still alive?" asked the editor.

"Yes. The doctor come out awhile ago and said he had a fightin' chance to pull through. That cut was a nasty one, though; didn't miss the heart very far, and landed in some place with a big long name. Seems like when a fellow gets hurt it's always in a part we didn't know he had before."

"Did Wayne come over?" queried Munson.

"He's in there now. Said that in a case of this kind a preacher belonged at the side of a doctor, so I told him to go on in. He seemed all upset over it."

Munson and Paragraph were silent, gazing at the window where a light shone bright, the other lights having been turned down.

"That's his room," said the marshal, noting their gaze. "Seems kind o' solemn, don't it, standin' here, strong and well, and watchin' a place where a man's teeterin' on the brink of eternity?"

"Has Jim — said anything?" asked Munson, switching the ground with his buggy whip, and ignoring the marshal's observation.

"Nothing that could be understood. He muttered a little, though. The doctor said he wouldn't let him say a word even if he was conscious and wanted to. He says a few words might steal all of his strength, and he'd rather take a chance of saving a man's life than to trade his life for a chance of getting enough evidence to hang another man. I expect he's right, but what Doc says will have to go, right or wrong. A man's life outweighs the law every time."

They went into the kitchen and sat by the fire, discussing in low tones the events of the night, and Munson injected a vein of cheerfulness into the group by recounting the events of a recent political rally. After awhile Wayne came to them and said that Gordon was sleeping naturally and that his pulse was better. "The doctor says that it's a slim chance, though," he added. The preacher's face seemed gray and wan to Munson and the editor, who covertly scrutinized him closely. "I'll stay here a few hours longer," he said, and turned away.

Ward glanced out the window. The eastern sky had paled somewhat and a faint rosy tinge was perceptible. Out in the barn-yard a rooster crowed

noisily as though challenging his brothers to dispute that he had first detected the signs of dawn.

"That rooster's right about it," said the marshal, with a yawn. "It's 'most daylight. Them bloodhounds ought to be here soon. Guess I'll go pull off the guards and let 'em eat a bite and get a wink of sleep before I start the chase. I suppose the sheriff ought to run this thing, but if he don't, I will."

"If you're goin' over there now, I reckon Paragraph and I will go along," said Munson. "It's only a little out of our way home, and I'd kind o' like to see the place. I've got the derndest bump of curiosity you ever saw. Yes, sir, I'm a lump of curiosity bronzed on top." He rubbed his red head as he spoke, and the editor glanced at him rather curiously, wondering what had caused Munson to begin drifting back into his old manner of speech.

"I don't suppose there's much to see, but I'll be glad of your company, anyway," replied Ward, leading the way out to the horses.

"Course there ain't much to see," responded Munson. "There ain't much to see in a vacuum, either, but I read in the papers that scientists are losing lots of sleep trying to find one. No, sir, there ain't much to see over there, but my natural curiosity just compels me to go. Don't believe I'd 'a' been a candidate if it hadn't been for curiosity. I wanted to find out what mean things the other fellows could say about me."

Ward laughed and they drove away. They found

the guards stamping up and down to keep the chill out of their blood. The spot where the stabbing had taken place was not far from the road, and was in the edge of a little woods pasture. A tree had been felled close by, and it was very probable that the would-be assassin had concealed himself in the shadows of the tree-top and that he had sprung upon Gordon as he passed. The marshal dismissed the guards and then named an hour for them to assemble again at the same spot.

"If there's any merit in a dog's nose we'll get the fellow," said Ward, as Munson began plying him with questions prompted by his natural curiosity, as he declared. "I'm goin' to put the dogs around that tree-top first, and see if they don't pick up something there that can be worked out."

"Well, if you need me just call on me," said Munson. "This is where our roads part, and I expect I'd better be gettin' towards home. They'll want to know about Gordon."

"Count me in, too," said Miller.

"All right, boys. I'm obliged, I'm sure. If I need help I'll call on you. I'll go on to town now and meet the dogs."

The two rigs started in opposite directions. Objects were becoming distinguishable in the half-dawn, and the flush in the east had deepened. In half an hour it would be daylight. Munson and the editor drew their overcoats tighter about themselves as the chill breeze bit at them. They drove a short distance in silence, Munson frequently turn-

ing his head to look to the rear. Suddenly he veered the horse to the side of the road and began turning around.

"Jap, what on earth are you going to do?" asked Paragraph.

"Goin' back to that — place," responded Munson, briefly. Then he added, "I guess Ward's far enough away."

"And what do you intend to do back there?"

"I would give Ward a little more distance, but it's goin' to get light here too soon if I do," said Jap, as though his companion had not spoken. He touched the horse with the whip and they were quickly whirled back over the road they had come. The editor noted the evasion and refrained from further questioning.

"You stay in the buggy and hold the lines — and keep a sharp lookout," said Munson, as he drew up opposite the place where the deadly struggle had taken place but a few hours before.

Without a word Miller took the lines, and then Munson sprang from the buggy and began climbing the fence. "Better turn around, so we'll be ready to light out in the right direction if you see any one coming." Then he walked straight to the tree-top.

"Look out, Jap, or you'll leave a trail, yourself, for the dogs," called the editor, warningly.

"Then you think I'll be successful, do you?" replied Munson, dryly, walking along by the side of the fallen tree.

“Successful! Jap, for God’s sake, you don’t mean — you don’t mean that — ”

“Never mind what I mean if it makes you stutter. If them dogs smell my feet maybe it’ll paralyze ’em on the spot.” He chuckled in his old way, and then grew serious, as he added: “If they succeed in trailing me I can soon prove an alibi — and maybe some one else can’t if they trail him.”

“Jap, you’re a diamond, if there ever was one on two legs,” said Miller, enthusiastically, but Munson continued tramping around the vicinity where Gordon had been found, and as he walked he kept diving his hand into a little sack, and then scattering something behind him.

“Well, I don’t intend to give them hounds any fun if this cayenne pepper will spoil their smelling-bee,” replied Munson, scattering the pepper freely. “I guess this battle-ground’s pretty well warmed up now, so I’ll lead off down along the fence. I’ll get into the buggy farther down.” He walked away from the place, scattering the pepper in his tracks, and when some distance from the spot where the struggle had occurred he climbed the fence once more and entered the buggy.

“Good thing I had a lot of cayenne pepper in the house,” he said. “Wife’s been givin’ it to Johnny for the rheumatiz, but Bub will have to go it stiff-legged until I get some more.”

“And that was what you went to the house for, was it?” asked Miller, slapping Munson on the shoulder.

“Well, Paragraph, something had to be done. I’m strong for the law, myself, but I just *couldn’t* let ’em capture — him without tryin’ to save him. I don’t know what took place over there by that tree at midnight, but I know that Gordon was mighty insolent towards him before they left the house. I don’t believe in this knife business, but it ain’t for me to judge his provocation.”

“It wouldn’t help Gordon any for them to capture — him,” added the editor, anxious to add his voice to the apology for scheming against the law.

“Glad you’re stickin’ to me,” said Munson. “I just couldn’t let ’em trail — him. I hope that pepper and my strolling will fool ’em, but them dogs are tough propositions.”

Paragraph got out at the Wilson place and Munson drove on home. The sun had not yet looked over the horizon, but the editor found the Wilson family astir when he entered the house, and it was evident that sleep had not rested long on the eyes of any member of the household. Susanna came forward shyly to greet her husband, whom she had scarcely seen since they made their wedding journey on foot from the minister’s house back to Munson’s barn-warming. The editor noted the subdued manner of those about him and resolved to dispel the gloom of the tragedy if possible. In this emergency he had recourse to his “stilts.”

“A blithe morning, gentle folks,” he said, cheerily, with one of his most profound bows. “The

vagabond of the shears and paste-pot who stole from you this fair one standing at my side, blushing and rosy as the clouds that have heralded the rising sun, now returns to beg thy gracious forgiveness. 'Twas elopement or the rut — and we feared the rut."

"William," said the old man, kindly, as they greeted him, "we all congratulate you, as we have already said to your bride. No man should be married more than once, and he should be married that once in his own way, so you need make no apologies. But tell us of Gordon."

The editor gave an account of the wounded man's condition, and then told of the arrangements made to put the bloodhounds on the trail of Gordon's assailant. Purposely he drew a graphic word picture of the preparations for the man hunt, and expressed the strong conviction that the dogs would speedily run down the one who struck the blow. As he talked he noted with keen eyes the eager manner in which Lorraine drank in his words. He saw her clasp her hands suddenly as he spoke of the coming of the bloodhounds, and then — was he mistaken or did her cheeks grow ashen and a look, half-horror, half-appeal, steal into her eyes as he declared that the man would undoubtedly be captured?

"I was just getting ready to start over to Gordon's," said Joe, who had stood a silent listener. "I drove into town with Bess Craig, and on my way out stopped at Munson's. Lorraine wanted to

come home, so I brought her over. That's the reason I haven't been with you."

"Have they any clue?" asked Lorraine, and her voice trembled slightly.

Miller shook his head. "Gordon hasn't spoken intelligibly yet, and the doctor says he must not talk when he becomes rational. His life is just this way." He balanced a lead-pencil on one finger. "On this side is life; on that side, death, and the exertion of making a statement might tilt the scales."

"Then it all depends on the dogs?" she asked.

"It does — until he gets strong enough to talk."

She stood at the window a moment, and the first beams of the rising sun peeped in and caressed her face. As she stood thus in the glow of the sunrise the editor saw a tear steal from her eye and trace a pathway of sadness on her cheek. She brushed it away and turned again to the editor.

"Did you see — Mr. Wayne?"

"He's there at Gordon's bedside," he replied.

She turned once more to the sunrise, and stood silent, and, beckoning to Susanna, he slipped from the room and left her alone. An hour later Ward, the marshal, accompanied by half a dozen men who had been summoned as a posse, drove to the scene of the tragedy. In the buggy with Ward sat a stranger, and at their feet crouched two powerful bloodhounds.

"It will be hard work," said the stranger, "owing to the fact that others have been on the ground

— for instance, the men who found him — but if there's a trail to be found these dogs will pick it up."

Miller, Joe, and Munson were on hand when the men and hounds reached the spot. The hounds leaped from the buggy when Ward drove up to the fence, but the stranger held the long chains with firm hands, and the animals contented themselves with running about in a circle, straining at their leashes with their noses to the ground. A little group of men had assembled to witness the beginning of the chase, but as the savage-looking dogs leaped and plunged about with much growling and showing of teeth, there was a general skedaddle, fence-posts becoming occupied in a remarkably short space of time.

"Pretty likely looking set of dogs," remarked Munson, surveying the animals critically.

"Ah-h-h!" It was a half-smothered exclamation from Paragraph. He was gazing intently at the hounds. They had been led to the side of the fallen tree, and, after industriously sniffing at the ground for a moment, one had given a sharp yelp and darted forward, nose near the ground, the strong collar and chain alone preventing the dog from breaking into a run. Almost at the same instant the other hound gave tongue and bounded along in the rear of its mate, also with nose to the ground.

"They've struck a trail!" "They've struck a trail!" came in a chorus from the spectators perched on the fence-posts, and some of them even

became so enthusiastic as to carefully descend, showing the greatest respect for the barbed wire composing the fence, and venture nearer the hounds.

"The dogs are winners! They've got a warm trail!" exclaimed Joe, enthusiastically.

"But the trail may prove *too* hot," murmured Munson so softly that none but Paragraph heard.

Along the side of the tree the dogs fairly dragged the keeper, and then where the branches spread wide they circled about, darting away from the tree for a distance and then returning.

"You've failed, Jap," whispered Miller, and the little man, with his usually ruddy face pale, stood silent.

The dogs once more gave sharp yelps, and this time they led away from the tree straight for the spot where a stick in the ground marked the place of the struggle. In a moment they had reached the spot, and here they again paused. There was a groan from Munson as the hounds led away from the spot, led directly back into the woods and in the direction of the Wilson place.

"He must have hurried straight home in an effort for an alibi," said the editor in a lone tone, Joe having followed closer after the dogs.

"It looks that way," said Munson, gloomily. "But look! The dogs are acting queer!"

It was true. As the hounds trailed away from the spot where the fight had taken place they went more slowly than before, and the leash chains hung

slack. Then one faltered and paused, his muzzle in the air, but the other kept on. In a moment the one that had paused went forward again, but the progress was brief. The leading dog was now at a standstill.

“Good dog! Good dog! Go trail! Go trail! Hi-i-i-oo!” The voice of the trainer sounded encouragingly, and the rallying cry was given with emphasis, but the dogs only whined a response. Once more “Hi-i-i-oo!” came from the trainer’s lips, and the animals put their noses to the ground and forged forward a few steps in an uncertain way. Then they stopped again, and, whining, began clawing at their noses.

“What does it mean?” asked Ward, anxiously.

The trainer knelt beside his charges and examined their noses. Then he looked up and flung out a curse.

“It means cayenne pepper, that’s what!” he exclaimed. And Munson turned his back and softly whistled a few bars of a rollicking jig, while Paragraph was suddenly seized with a fit of coughing.

The trainer sent for water, and, after thoroughly washing the noses of his man-trailers, he set them again to their task, but this time they went but a few feet until they again paused and began clawing at their noses.

“Their noses are becoming inflamed now, and about one more trial will put them out of the trailing business for to-day,” said Jap in a low tone to the editor, and then added: “I was suspicious of

that direction, and most of Johnny's rheumatiz medicine is lying along that route."

Paragraph wanted to seize the farmer in his arms and give him a hug of admiration, but he simply looked his pleasure, and then walked up to where the dogs were making gallant attempts to follow the trail. But Munson had sown the pepper broadcast and thick, and had been lucky enough to get goodly quantities right where it was most needed.

"It's no use," the trainer said at last. "The dogs' noses are raw as a piece of beefsteak, and they can't do any more work. That fellow has beat the best pair of hounds in Indiana."

"Can't they work to-morrow?" queried the marshal, anxiously.

"It will be too late. Thirty-six hours this time of year means failure for dogs."

"But maybe I could get other dogs and keep at it to-day," said Ward, desperately.

"Good hounds are scarce," replied the trainer, bathing the noses of his whining dogs. "You couldn't get a pair here for several hours — and then they'd get against the same thing these have. It's no use, I tell you. If you catch that fellow you'll have to do it some other way."

The fence-post audience had left their havens of retreat and crowded about the dogs, offering numerous suggestions, all of which the trainer received in contemptuous silence.

"Tracking rabbits is different from tracking men," he said, at last, in reply to some one's elab-

orate statements as to how he successfully tracked rabbits, and the man admitted that there was no doubt some difference, but that the principle was the same.

The dogs were placed in the buggy, and Ward, buried deep in his overcoat, took up the lines to drive away.

"Mr. Ward!" shouted Munson. "If you need any help let me know at once."

"And count me in, too," said Miller, and the marshal once more thanked them for their zeal in assisting the officers of the law.

Munson, Miller, and Joe got into Munson's buggy. "I'll take you into town, Paragraph," said the little man. "That fellow speakin' about cayenne pepper just reminds me that I must buy some for Johnny's rheumatiz. We're clear out of it." He clucked to the horse and asked Joe if he had heard anything new in a political way. And by that token the editor knew that Munson's mind was at ease.

That same morning a man entered the telegraph-office at Craigville and handed the operator a message addressed to "Mr. John Ormand, Riverside." The message read:

"Gordon knifed last night. Still alive."

The message was signed "A Friend," but if Paragraph had seen him he would have recognized him as the man whom Marshal Ward had "inter-

viewed" because of his having spoken harshly of Wayne.

It was afternoon when the preacher returned from his vigil at Gordon's bedside. Loss of sleep had left its impress upon him and he looked haggard and hollow-eyed, but as he opened the door he stood face to face with Lorraine, and a tinge of color came to his cheeks.

"I thought you were at school," he said, bowing to her.

She laughed in a strained manner, and no mirth was in her tones. "You must consult the family almanac," she said. "This is Saturday."

He passed his hand before his eyes in a puzzled way, as though endeavoring to arouse himself.

"Saturday?" he repeated, after a pause. "And was it only last night that we danced in the barn? And was it but these few hours ago that you sang? I hear the words now; they are beating on my wearied brain ceaselessly. And it was only last night!"

He sank into a chair, and the hand that brushed back the hair from his brow trembled.

"How weary you are," she said, softly.

He looked up. "You must pardon my weakness. I—but you are right. I am weary—wearied." His head drooped and he no longer looked into her face.

"And what of—Mr. Gordon?"

"I left him asleep. The doctor says his hurt is

less serious than was at first thought. The knife-blade barely missed a vital spot."

"Then he will recover?" There was a note of joyousness in her voice that did not escape the man in the chair, and he looked up quickly.

"Perhaps — though his condition is yet critical."

"And has he spoken?"

The preacher hesitated. "Not of the affair in the woods," he said.

"And he has whispered no names?"

Wayne slowly arose, his hat in hand, and stood for a moment with his shoulders squared and head erect, looking full into her eyes.

"Yes," he said, "he murmured a name over and over, and when we bent low to catch the word it came to us in broken syllables — 'Lor-raine!' 'Lor-raine!'" He turned and walked away, but she called to him, and he paused.

"And was there — no — other?" she asked, and her hands were clasped as if in prayer.

He shook his head. "There was no other," he answered, his voice lowered, and as the glad look leaped again to her eyes he turned away once more and left her.

She stood looking after him a moment, her hands still clasped, and then she suddenly dropped to her knees and alternately laughed and cried.

"Thank God! Thank God!" she sobbed. "It was *my* name he spoke! The bloodhounds have failed, and he has not given the name. Oh, God is good! God is merciful!"

That afternoon a carriage drove up to the Gordon home and John Ormand sprang out, and, leaving the driver to care for the team, he hastily ran up the walk and knocked at the door. He introduced himself and was admitted. Then he asked to see the doctor, explaining that his business was urgent. The physician, who was still on duty in the sick-room, came to him, and Ormand, pacing nervously up and down the room, asked permission to see Gordon.

“It is impossible,” responded the physician.

Ormand paused in his limping pace and fixed his cold eyes on the physician.

“I tell you I *must!*”

The physician shook his head. “I must be firm, Mr. Ormand,” he replied. “Gordon is conscious now, and has tried once or twice to speak, but I have hushed him each time.”

The promoter was silent a moment. Then his restless eyes noted a peculiar watch-charm worn by the other. A gleam of satisfaction shone in his eyes as he looked the physician full in the face and murmured a few words, at the same time making a sign with his hand. A look of surprise was evident on the doctor's face, and he hesitated a moment, and then slowly raised his hand and made an answering signal. Ormand's hand was outstretched, and the physician reached forward and grasped it, the promoter's fingers closing over the other's in a peculiar grip.

"I tell you I *must!*" he repeated, and again the physician felt the peculiar grip.

"Your business cannot wait?" he asked, endeavoring to withdraw his hand.

"It cannot."

"But his life or death may depend on my decision."

"If I can have five minutes with him, I can aid your skill by stimulating his will-power by adding an incentive for life."

The physician hesitated. His hand was free now. "I am afraid I must decline to —" he began, but Ormand leaned forward and took the watch-charm between his fingers, and then fastened his eyes on those of the doctor.

"Do you mean to say that you repudiate this?" he interrupted.

The other stood silent. "No," he said at last. "I cannot do that. You may see him."

For an instant the gold shone in Ormand's teeth as his thin lips were drawn back in a fleeting smile.

"Alone?" he asked.

"If you so will it."

"You are very kind. I must request that it be so."

The physician was now pacing the room as Ormand had done. "I feel that I am jeopardizing the man's life," he said, "but you say you can add an incentive for him to live. If that be so it will be a help. I cannot forget my oath — but (he stopped suddenly, confronting the promoter) you

will make your stay in the room brief, will you not?"

"You say he is conscious?" asked Ormand.

"Perfectly rational at present," was the reply.

"Then five minutes is all I ask."

"I will announce you," said the physician, and led the way to Gordon's room. He left the promoter in the hallway a moment, but soon returned.

"Go in at once," he said, and then, holding up the emblem-charm, he added: "In the name of this I beg that you withdraw quickly."

Ormand bowed and stepped within the room, closing the door behind him. The physician stood in the hallway, watch in hand, and anxiously watched the time. The minutes passed, and there was no sound from within. Three minutes, and still no sign. The hand on the watch-dial slowly crept past the four-minute point, but scarcely had it done so when the door opened and the promoter came out. The watch snapped, and was dropped back into a pocket, and a sigh of relief escaped the doctor's lips.

"Am I on time?" asked Ormand.

"With a half-minute to spare," was the reply.

Again Ormand's lips receded from his teeth, displaying the gold that punctuated their snowy whiteness.

"Let your mind be easy," he said. "I am not a physician, but I declare to you that Jim Gordon will live."

CHAPTER XV.

CLOSING THE CAMPAIGN

THE Presidential election was at hand and Willow Township was aflame with politics, the Dunkards alone pursuing their usual avocations undisturbed by the ebb and flow of political oratory. The attempt on Jim Gordon's life was discussed only as a truce when political word wars became so hot that each side was willing to retire from the conflict.

Jap Munson fairly flew around over the township, and oftentimes his voice was heard in two or more meetings in different precincts on the same night. Always he urged loyal support of the national ticket, but the burden of his homely eloquence was a plea for his own election.

"The poorhouse is just over the hill," he said, "and a President won't look after you if it becomes your fate to go there. It's the trustee that wipes your tears away, that builds your fires, and puts school-books into the hands of your children."

The question of a subsidy for the electric line represented by John Ormand was also to be settled at this election, and this added steam to the pressure

under which Willow Township people were living. The Craigville *Star* had entered into the campaign with vigor. It discreetly refrained from taking sides on the political questions, but on the question of subsidy it delivered broadsides, and column after column of editorials plowed their way through the rapidly thinning ranks of the advocates of the subsidy. The influence of the *Star* had made itself felt, and Ormand's counselors determined to try the power of money on the young editor. Ormand had not forgotten an experience he had with Miller in the office of the *Riverside Sun*, so he was not sanguine of success, but as one of his lieutenants was eager to try the experiment he gave his consent, and on the day following the would-be briber stepped from the train in Craigville. He had no difficulty in finding the *Star* office, for next to that of the Tyler House, the *Star* sign was the largest and most conspicuous in the town.

The stranger found Paragraph busily engaged at his desk, and began a discussion of the hard work and meagre pay of a country editor. Paragraph eyed him keenly, regarding his great interest in country editors as cause for suspicion.

"Candidate for anything?" he asked, abruptly.

The stranger laughed. "I have no desire for office," he replied.

"Maybe your friends are forcing you to run. That's the way most of them talk."

"My friends are not that sort. If I should catch a man too deeply interested in my welfare I would

at once gamble that he had some irons of his own that he wanted heated. I'm a cynic, I suppose."

"Perhaps I am, also," replied Miller, putting his feet on his desk and tilting back his chair. "In fact, if you are I must be, for I thought that a man with such an interest as you have displayed in country editors must have a few irons that he wanted warmed. Country editors sometimes play the part of a bellows."

The stranger bit his lip and looked vexed. "My interest arises from the fact that I was once a newspaper man, and, naturally, I have a fellow feeling for the men who wield the pen."

"Um-m-m, yes. No doubt. And now, probably, you are an advance agent for a theatrical company."

"Nothing of the kind. I am a lawyer."

The editor smiled. "Pardon my mistake," he said. "It was a natural one, I assure you. Every show agent on the road assaults the editors with the sympathetic statement that they were formerly newspaper men. It's a pretty good graft, and wins extra space in a lot of papers."

"I have noticed several copies of the *Star*, and in a great many newspaper offices I hear it well spoken of," suavely replied the visitor, ignoring Paragraph's sarcasm.

The editor's eyes narrowed, but he made no reply. He waited.

"I hear the *Star's* vigorous editorials discussed quite often," continued the stranger.

"Yes," said the editor, tapping his chin reflectively with his pencil. "I am well supplied with opinions."

"Quite so, quite so," was the response. "But do your opinions find a good market?"

"Without opinions a man is but a dry husk, rattling weakly as the winds toss him this way or that. With opinions a man shouts into the funnel of the world; without opinions he becomes a human phonograph, whining out the thoughts and ideas that the master minds have spoken into the funnel."

"But is there not a better market for phonographs than for shouters?"

The editor looked steadily at the other for a moment. "Look here," he said at last. "I ignored your first remark concerning a market for opinions, thinking it might have no significance, but you seem determined to press the idea."

The stranger nodded. "Yes," he said, "I believe I have insisted on the point. You see, being an ex-editor, I have a sympathy for the men who still toil with their brains for clods who are incapable of appreciation of the editor's expenditure of intellect in their behalf, and who will only jeer at the editor when the sheriff nails his placards on the door."

"The newspaper office is the womb of progress and enlightenment," replied Paragraph, "and the blessings that are born to the world are the editor's children. Surely pride in the children is sufficient

recompense for the pains and sorrows attendant upon birth."

"But there are men who are willing to pay for assistance in certain projects while the editor is launching his 'children' on their career."

"And now, no doubt, you are coming to the object of your visit!"

"I can lighten your burden considerably and make it worth your while to —"

The editor's feet came down off the desk with a bang, and a quick gesture caused the visitor to pause. Paragraph rose to his feet, his face flushed and with his hands clenched.

"Don't say any more," he said, and his voice was not even. "One time a man tried to buy me, but before he got through with his proposition a storm got loose in my head, and when I got a grip on my anchor chains again the fellow had fallen through the door and hurt himself some. Now you had better go as my head feels a little warm."

"But you haven't heard my proposition. I represent —"

"You represent the devil in one of his many forms — I don't care which one. I don't want to hear your proposition. Can't you see that I am trying to control myself? It isn't far to the door. Get to it quickly."

"So you threaten me!"

"No, I only warn you. Now go!" The editor pointed to the door, and the stranger hesitated a moment, and then, picking up his hat, he walked

quickly to the door, and without a word passed down the stairs.

The next issue of the *Star* was more vigorous than ever in its opposition to the subsidy, and it was almost a certainty that if an electric railway came through Willow Township it would not be constructed on money dipped out of the pockets of the taxpayers of that township. Wayne had declared his intention of keeping clear of politics, but as the climax of the campaign approached he found it more and more difficult to remain neutral.

"There ain't no such thing as 'neutral' in politics," declared Munson, when the preacher had confessed his troubles on that score. "A man's just naturally bound to whoop it up for one side or the other. You hear me? You hear *me*? Just naturally bound to."

Wayne laughed and said he believed Jap was right. And that afternoon as the preacher was repairing a fence a buggy stopped beside him, and a cheery voice hailed him. He looked up and saw a sharp-featured man with clear blue-gray eyes clambering out of the vehicle. It was Dickson, the lawyer, Dickson, the candidate for representative. Their hands met in hearty clasp, and the lawyer squeezed the preacher's fingers until the latter begged him to stop.

"Beg your pardon, Parson," said the other, laughing. "That shows the force of habit. Why, for weeks and weeks I've been romping up and down the highways and byways and through the

hedges cracking fingers. It's a fine art in the world of politics. A man may be a lop-eared scoundrel, and everybody may know it, but if he can crack their fingers in a hand-shake, two-thirds of his enemies will allow that he's a pretty good fellow."

"And I'm your latest victim," said Wayne.

Dickson sobered down. "I'm asking pardon, Mr. Wayne, for I didn't mean to woo you with a hand-shake. You were a victim of habit — and of sincerity."

"All right," replied the preacher, "but tell me the news. Of course I get the papers here, but it's not like mingling with the world. It's something like witnessing a play without scenic effects or costumes."

Dickson drew a cigar from his pocket and bit the end off. Then he fished in his pocket for a match, and it was not until the tiny smoke-wreaths were curling up that he spoke.

"You want the news, eh? Well, I'm going to be elected. No doubt that is news, and I'll bet there are hundreds of people in Tyler County who would call it bad news. That's all the news I know, for a candidate must be like a horse if he expects to win — he must have only one idea in his head. And that idea must be in regard to his election."

Wayne made no reply, and the lawyer puffed meditatively at his cigar a moment. Then he looked at the preacher, and as he took the cigar from his mouth there was a suspicion of a sound in his throat, as though he had choked a word that had sought to

reach his lips. He bit the end of the cigar nervously, and then suddenly turned to the preacher.

"Look here, Wayne, I've come down here to talk you into doing me a favor. Now just wait a minute (as the preacher was about to speak), I've got a lot of respect for the 'cloth,' meaning a minister, even if the 'cloth' is blue overalls, and I don't want you to rush into any promises. The favor I want is no small one. In fact, I want you to make a speech for me."

Dickson rammed his hands into his pockets and leaned against the fence-post as though resigned to meet some sad fate. Wayne stared at him a moment.

"But, Dickson, you know that I've been neutral during this affair, and I suppose I should continue that way."

"Neutral, fiddlesticks! There is no neutrality in politics."

The preacher laughed. "Almost Munson's exact words," he said.

"They're true, anyway. If you want to make a foothold for yourself in Indiana do something in politics. You probably would not care to buy a vote nor shanghai a float, but —"

"Shanghai a float!"

"Yes — dope a vote-seller with whiskey, and then lock him up in a secret room until election day, or load him in a box car and ship him out of town the night before election."

"I don't think I care to become entangled in such practices," said Wayne, frowning.

"Of course you don't, though it's one of the tricks of the trade in Indiana, but you can make a speech. I haven't heard you, but I have heard of you, and I want you to go on the platform for me. Just once is all I ask, and this is a case of emergency. There will be a big rally in Riverside the night before election, and the chap who was to make the speech is down sick. All of the regular speakers are dated, and I've got to hustle for a speaker."

Wayne whistled a long-drawn note, and Dickson continued hastily: "I know it's asking much of you, but I am on the rocks, and if you don't throw me a life-line I'm liable to be battered to pieces in sight of shore. I won't offer you money for fear you'd use me like you did that mad dog, but if you'll do this for me the night will never be too dark nor the day too cold for me to do you a service."

"I'll do it," said Wayne, after a moment's pause. "Sometimes I wobble a little in my views of a preacher's duty, privileges, and sphere, but —"

"That's human," said Dickson.

"Yes, I suppose it's human," was Wayne's response. Then he added: "And I've been human all of my life." He looked away across the fields, sombre and gray, with shocks of corn standing like Indian tepees here and there. In the distance a fringe of bare-limbed timber marked the course of the Wabash, and he thought of how the heat had

frolicked across those fields and over those woodlands when first he had come to this place. He thought of the temptations, of the struggles that had been his, and of how the mists of weakness had often veiled the Cross. "Yes, I've been human always," he said.

There was a suspicion of self-reproach in his tone that did not escape the sharp ear of the lawyer, and he laid his hand on the preacher's shoulder.

"Never mind," he said, kindly. "The man who is worthy of victory gets up every time he stubs his toe and falls. The last time I saw my old mother alive she placed her hand on my head and said: 'Dave, my son, you are going out into the world to struggle with the problems of life. Remember that you are human, not that you may excuse weakness, but that you may not become discouraged if you stumble. Do not smother your conscience and you will not lose God.' I've never forgotten those words. We may 'wobble,' as you term it, but if we have followed conscience we have lived up to our moral sphere."

They shook hands and parted, and Wayne turned once more to his labors, but his heart was heavy and his head was aching with the turmoil of thoughts that were rioting in his brain. That night he sought his room early, as was his custom of late, and to the family below a faint fragrance of tobacco was borne. The preacher was cremating the past.

And his sleep was broken by strange fancies. He saw a girl standing in the moonlight, a girl with a

sceptre of roses in her hand. He saw her press something to her lips, and then, holding it before her, she began plucking the roses from her sceptre and weaving them into a garland with which she surrounded that which she had pressed to her lips. The dreamer bent closer and saw that she held a photograph, and on its back was an old song. And was the picture a mirror that it should reflect the image of she who held it? But he saw that there was a difference, as though the mirror did not reflect true the curves, the tilt of the chin. The faces were the same — and yet they were different. Still closer he leaned — and awoke. The moonlight was streaming in at the window, and in its silvery flood stood Joe. In his eyes a deep sadness was mirrored, and in his hand he held before him a bit of lace — a handkerchief.

The day of the final political rally in Riverside arrived, and in the afternoon Joe and Wayne drove into Craigville, the latter to take the train for Riverside, and the former to return home with the horse and buggy. The sky was overcast with clouds and a raw wind blew from out of the northwest. The grass was dead at the roadside; they heard the shouts of a group of boys gathering walnuts; a pawpaw-tree, standing close beside the road, was drooping with its load of fruit now fast ripening under the kiss of the frost; a crow cawed from the skeleton limb of an old oak.

“A genuine Hoosier fall day,” said Joe.

"Well, it's gloomy enough," replied Wayne, tucking the robe tighter about him.

"Gloomy, perhaps, but restful. There is an indefinable something about it that I love. You may tell me of the poetry of the Southland, but a fall day in Indiana with all of its sweet sadness strikes a strange chord in my bosom that — Whoa!"

"What's the matter?"

Joe pointed to a rail fence separating the woodland from the corn-field. "The poetry of Indiana — that fence," he said. "I spoke of it once before, but I never pass it without an impulse to take my hat off and bow to that remnant of happy days. It's a decaying memory zigzagging back to my boyhood."

Wayne smiled. "You have the soul of a poet, Joe," he said.

"In the garb of a farmer," was the reply in which there was a trace of bitterness.

"You don't like the farm?"

Joe spoke to the horse, and they drove in silence for a few moments. "I like the farm all right," he said at last, "but, as I told you once before, I am a dreamer, and I am just a little afraid that a dreamer will not make a success on the farm — or any other place. I am ambitious to have my name known beyond the narrow confines of Tyler County." He flicked the whip, and then exclaimed impulsively: "Bob, I want to be a writer!"

"Oh, ho! So that is the dream that —"

"Call it a nightmare, Parson."

Wayne laughed. "Well, why don't you write?" he asked.

Joe turned to him eagerly. "Do you think I could do it, Bob?"

"You can't do it if you don't try, that's certain."

The town lay before them, and they turned into Main Street. The chill winds had driven the loafers from the bench in front of the Tyler House, but genial Landlord Hausman stood on the front steps, and his face lighted up as he saw them.

"I heard you was to speak in Riverside to-night," he said, plunging out to the buggy and squeezing Wayne's hand, "and I was just standin' out here figurin' a little. Says I, 'Jake Hausman, if you miss hearin' the Parson speak you'll repent of it,' but there's goin' to be a banquet at the Tyler House to-night — Good Templars, Daughters of Rebekah, or some of them lodges, are goin' to initiate and then eat oysters and fixin's at my place — and I just ought to be here to look after things."

"Don't neglect business, Hausman," replied Wayne, laughing. "Besides, the fewer of my friends that hear my speech, the more friends I'll have to-morrow."

There was nothing particularly funny about the remark, but Hausman roared with laughter and, reaching over, slapped Joe enthusiastically on the back.

"Listen to that," he said, recovering his breath a moment. "The Bible tells of somebody killing

somebody with the jaw-bone of an ass, but I never heard of the jaw-bone of a preacher hurtin' anybody very seriously. But there comes Bill Ward. I'll bet a barrel of sauerkraut he goes to Riverside."

The marshal came out to the buggy and shook hands all around. "Glad to see you, Parson," he said. "Don't believe I'd 'a' seen you if I hadn't heard Hausman bellowin'. Jake's a sort of social signal bureau. When you hear his fog-horn goin' you know he's found some fellow worth palaverin' with."

"Which is a neatly turned compliment to both Hausman and myself," said Wayne. "How is the family, Ward?"

"Fine, sir; fine. But at night when wife hears a dog bark she can't sleep. Hideous things get into her dreams. She's taught the little girl a prayer, and she says it every night now." There was a slight break in his voice, and then he grasped the preacher's hand again and held it tight as he continued: "And, Parson, when she says that prayer I go to my knees, too. She always asks God to watch over you and give you strength to do your duty—as you did that day when—when the dog—"

"Well, well, Ward, haven't you forgotten that affair yet?" asked Wayne, interrupting him.

The marshal turned his honest eyes full on the minister and shook his head. "No, sir," he said, "nor I won't forget it."

"Well, let's talk politics," said Hausman, im-

patiently. "Are you goin' to Riverside to hear the Parson speak to-night?"

"Sure!" was the prompt reply. "I was just going to speak about it. I'm going, and I'm going to have a seat on the stage, or I'll start trouble."

"Then I'm goin', too," said Hausman. "The lodge folks can carry the Tyler House away if they want to, but I'm goin' to hear that speech. I'll see you later, for I've got to go scramble into a white shirt." He waved his hand in dismissal, and turned towards the hotel.

After a few minutes more conversation Ward also left them, promising to be at the train. Joe and Wayne drove on to Craig's blacksmith shop, where they found Timothy making the sparks fly. He greeted them with a cheery salutation, but his right hand did not cease its sturdy blows with the hammer.

"There's a couple of nail-kegs that ain't workin' — set down," he said. "I'll be through here in a minute."

He hammered industriously for a short time, and then holding the bit of iron in a pair of tongs, he surveyed it critically. Then he struck it a few more blows and held it aloft again. Evidently it was satisfactory this time, for he plunged it into the cooling tub, and when it had ceased to hiss tossed it near the door.

"Business has been pretty good here lately," he said, wiping his hands on his apron and kicking another empty nail-keg into position for a seat.

"Now that harvest is over the farmers are getting their iron work patched up. But what's the news in the country?"

"Quiet as a Dunkard meeting," said Joe.

"And Jim Gordon — how's he gettin' along?"

"I called at the house yesterday," said Wayne, "and was told that the doctor had some hopes of his recovery. They wouldn't let me see him. Said no one but the doctor was to be admitted."

Timothy got up and gave the bellows a few pumps, and nursed the fire in the forge a moment.

"No clue yet?" he asked.

"Not the slightest that I know of."

"Strange," said Craig, meditatively.

"Yes, it is strange," replied Wayne. "And sometimes I think —" He paused suddenly.

"Sometimes you think what?" inquired Joe, quickly.

"I suppose it's foolish, but sometimes I think that knife-thrust was intended for me. I have stirred up plenty of enemies since I have been in Tyler County. Maybe the fellow who did it was after me, and made a mistake in the dark."

Timothy smote his hands together. "By jing, Parson! If that's the case you had better carry a gun. If they tried it once they'll try it again."

"I don't believe I care to go armed, but I'll keep on my guard," replied the preacher.

"You bet you must. I hadn't thought of that idea, but it looks reasonable. Campaign times in Indiana are pretty bitter sometimes, and the last

campaign and this are the worst I ever knew. Besides, you've been fightin' this subsidy pretty strong."

The chill, raw day had made it necessary to have the doors of the shop closed. As Timothy stopped speaking a merry whistle was heard without.

"That's Paragraph's 'Banks of the Wabash,'" said Joe, laughing. "When he comes without 'The Wabash' send for a doctor at once."

The latch rattled and one of the big doors swung open far enough to admit a head with a pair of glasses resting on the nose.

"Come in, you drone," called the smith, in mock harshness. "I'd think that a chap whose only labor was with a lead-pencil would be ashamed to show his face among honest working men."

The editor came in smiling. Then he sobered down and looked reproachfully at Craig. "Tim," he said, "you do me an injustice. Your hands are hardened by toil, but the labor of thought has worn callouses on my brain."

"You mean on your conscience, don't you?" asked Joe, laughing.

"I refuse to discuss the question further. Parson, how are you? I heard you were in town, and I knew that Joe would drag you to this place at once. You deliver a speech in Riverside to-night, I believe."

"Waiting on the train now," said the preacher.

"Well, can't you go up to the *dulce domum* with me a moment — shut up your laughing, Joe, that's

Latin for 'Sweet Home,' and it's all right. I am a regular ghoul on dead languages. I dig up a word every once in awhile."

"Don't believe I can go now, Miller," said Wayne. "I must —"

"Never mind. No excuse necessary. Susanna would be glad to see you, though, and I just got a load of wood on subscription, so I know the house is warm. But I'm going to Riverside with you."

"Look here, Paragraph!" exclaimed Craig. "What's the reason I didn't get my paper this week? Been to the post-office three times, but no *Star*."

The editor winked slyly at Joe and Wayne, and then turned to the smith. "The plate house failed to send me a puzzle picture this week, Tim, and I didn't suppose you'd care for a paper without one."

"Well, it's a mighty interestin' feature," replied the blacksmith, "but if you print any more with a whole barn-yard full of chickens, and pigs, and things to be found, I'll quit you."

"All right, Tim, I'll remember your threat." Then he turned to Wayne, and his face was serious. He put his hands in his trousers pockets and stood silent a moment. "Parson," he said, at last, "Dave Dickson must have coaxed you pretty hard to get you to make a speech for him."

"Well, yes," replied Wayne. "He did ask me rather earnestly. He didn't beg, though — just stated the case like a man. I had said that I would

not mix in politics, but, somehow, I wanted to help Dickson if possible. I believe he's true blue and will work for the interest of this county. That electric railway crowd is back of the other man, and it's a rotten aggregation all the way through. But, to tell the truth, I like Dickson, and I expect common, every-day friendship had as much to do with my decision as anything."

"Dickson's a good man to be friends with," replied Paragraph, slowly. "I knew him well when I was in Riverside, and I know he never forgets a favor. He's one of the brightest criminal lawyers in Central Indiana, too." The editor's face flushed slightly, as he added this last remark. He was thinking of Hallowe'en, when he saw two men passing through the woods, and of a time when he saw the bloodhounds following a trail straight for the Wilson place. It seemed to him that the preacher must read his accusing thoughts as they flashed through his brain, so he suddenly snatched his eyeglasses off and rubbed them vigorously with his handkerchief. "Cool weather puts steam on my glass eyes," he said. "I expect we had better be heading for the depot, as it's train-time."

"Don't forget to be on your guard," said the smith, following them to the door. "That suspicion of yours, Parson, in regard to Jim Gordon, seems reasonable to me, and if you are right about it this big rally to-night might give them another chance. But give 'em fits in that speech."

A long-drawn whistle sounded from somewhere

over the hill, and with Timothy's words of warning and encouragement in their ears the party hurried away. At the depot they found Hausman and Ward awaiting them, the former red-faced and looking decidedly uncomfortable in a stiffly starched shirt. As the party was clambering up the car-steps Joe grasped Wayne's hand.

"We'll be thinking of you to-night, Bob,—*all* of us," he whispered.

Wayne returned the pressure, and a mist dimmed his eyes for a moment. When he had brushed it away the train was clicking over the rails past the box cars on the long side-track. He entered the car and found Hausman struggling with the collar, which had become unfastened. Ward and the editor had gone to the other end of the car, and were already shaking hands with acquaintances and sounding the praise of Dickson.

"Parson, if you want to save a vote, see if you can hook up this collar and hames," puffed Hausman, twisting around so Wayne could see where his collar had become unbuttoned in the rear, and at the same time handing him his necktie, which he had removed in the struggle. "Nothin' but the thought of settin' on the stage could have crowded me into this shirt and fixin's, and now the dratted outfit's comin' to pieces already."

The preacher laughed, and in a moment had the collar and necktie securely fastened once more. Hausman puffed out a mighty sigh of relief.

"Guess I'll sleep in 'em to-night," he said, feel-

ing around his neck cautiously. "If they stick this time, I'll not risk takin' 'em off."

Presently Paragraph and Ward returned to them, and the four sat together during the remainder of the trip. The marshal, the editor, and the hotel man earnestly discussed the political situation, but Wayne was not in a mood for politics, and, after one or two ineffectual attempts to interest him in their discussion, the others left him alone. The bleakness of the gray landscape appealed to his mood. The train rattled on through naked woodlands, past gloomy fields of wheat stubble and shocked corn. Wayne was thinking of Joe's parting words: "We'll be thinking of you to-night, Bob, — *all* of us." He remembered how he had caught at that word "all." Had Joe's emphasis of the word been intentional or not? They would be thinking of him. Well, that was something to warm his heart. It had been so long, so long since any one had given him their thought. But was it not politics rather than himself that claimed their thoughts? Every one in Indiana was absorbed, body and soul, in politics, it seemed, and perhaps it was the success or failure of his political mission that drew their interest. When Joe said "all," had he meant Lorraine? But, a few miles away across the country, a man lay battling for life, a man whose whispers on the threshold of death had framed her name.

Presently he became conscious of a peculiar shuddering motion of the car, and realized that the train

was passing through the outskirts of Riverside and was slackening speed. A few minutes later and they were at the depot. As they went down the steps, Dickson shoved his way through the crowd and grasped Wayne's hand, and then the party was surrounded with some of the candidate's henchmen. After a short consultation, the preacher was ushered into a cab and driven to a hotel in company with Dickson, while Paragraph, Ward, and Hausman strolled down the street, after having arranged for admission to the stage.

Dickson and Wayne exchanged but few words during the ride to the hotel, but once inside the candidate's room, the latter placed his back to the door and reached out his hand.

"Wayne, I feel like a crisis has been passed. Let me shake your hand — no, not a candidate shake, but a genuine, friendly, grateful shake. When I saw the train rolling up to the station, I had a genuine case of buck ague, for fear something would cause you not to come."

"You had my word," said Wayne, simply.

"Yes, and I knew that it was as good as the promise of holy writ, but Indiana elections are everything but tame, and I was apprehensive. The physician says that the sudden illness of the other speaker is due to some kind of stuff that had been put in his food. I didn't know whether you would escape or not, and I tell you this meeting means everything to me. This campaign has been one of the fiercest I ever saw, and, while I feel pretty

confident of success, I know that I must keep hammering away until the polls close to-morrow night."

"And the other fellow's plan of campaign is — what?"

Dickson did not reply, but sat down, fished a handful of silver from his pocket, and slowly dropped the money piece by piece from one hand into the other.

"An eloquent pantomime," laughed Wayne.

"A powerful argument," said Dickson, and he did not laugh.

There was a knock at the door, and Dickson opened it and said: "Hello, Dick, come in!" to a sallow-faced man standing in the hallway, a man with heavy brows overhanging a pair of keen eyes, and with a tense expression about his mouth.

"Mr. Wayne, shake hands with Dick Crosby, our county chairman," said Dickson. "Wayne's going to throw me a verbal life-line to-night," he added, turning to the chairman, and the latter jerked his lips open into a dry grin, and then let them fly back to their tense expression, as though some one had pulled a draw-string.

"I've heard of you, Wayne," said Crosby, shaking hands mechanically, and then drawing a chair up to the long table in the room. "I've heard that you can talk, and that's what Dickson needs to-night in Riverside." He pulled a poll-book and some letters out of his pocket and began studying them, jotting down some figures on a blank tablet lying on the table. He scowled at the figures a

moment and then tapped the table with his pencil. "There's trouble over in the second precinct of Monroe Township," he said at last. "They're knifing the Congressional ticket, and there'll have to be some missionary work done there before morning. Why the devil don't that township chairman get his money to circulating? He's a peach! Knows as much about politics as a jaybird does about an automobile. I'll burn him up when I get to a telephone." He arose and stuffed his papers back into his pocket. "Rip it into 'em good and hard, Wayne," he said. "And don't sacrifice eloquence in search of facts. They've got their hides soaked full of figures, now give 'em word-painting, and sweep 'em off their feet. Get 'em to whoopin' and clappin' their hands and keep 'em goin'. The only fellows that can be handled now are the ones that you can mesmerize. I'm goin' to say a few words to that Monroe Township man." He jerked his lips apart in another dry grin and strode from the room.

"Mr. Crosby demands eloquence, but he doesn't appear to be a man of sentiment," said Wayne, as Dickson again locked the door.

"Crosby's a politician," was the response.

"And politics is the eternal enemy of sentiment, I suppose."

"Well, there doesn't seem to be much of the mixture in Crosby, at least. He revels in precinct meetings and ward caucuses; he delights in figures, and gorges his inner self on pluralities and major-

ities; the sweetest poem ever written is less interesting to him than a poll-book; a painting by one of the old masters is to him but a daub on good canvas that might otherwise have made splendid ballot-bags; to him money is chiefly to be desired, not because it will buy bread and meat and occasionally pie, but because it will buy men's votes."

Wayne shook his head. "And that is the mud-puddle in which I am about to play! Crosby is to buy all he can, and I am to mesmerize the rest — if I can. Ugh! I begin to feel smeary already. You needn't go out of your way to bring Crosby and me together again, Dickson."

The candidate smiled. "Well, I don't know but that you are right, but, if you should get acquainted with Crosby, you'll find that he is not a bad sort. He is honest and square all the way through, and — pardon me — pays a big church assessment."

"Yes, the church rosters contain many Crosbys, and, though they pay liberally for the mantle of the church behind which to hide, they prove a sorry burden. The average man sees through the disguise, and behind the mask of the Christian he detects the world, the flesh, and the devil. One such hypocrite does more toward undermining the rock on which the church is builded than the hoots and jeers of a dozen admitted agnostics."

"Then you do not think a man who buys votes is a Christian?" Dickson smiled as he spoke, as though amused at the thought.

"I do not consider that you are serious in your question, and therefore I will not reply to it."

There was another rap at the door, and Dickson opened it, but, instead of inviting his callers in, he talked to them briefly in the hallway, and Wayne heard the clink of silver. Then there was a general laugh, and, as the visitors went down the hall, the preacher heard them call back to Dickson to "look out for Adams Township to-night," as they would have "something warm."

"Nothing like being a candidate, Wayne," said Dickson, wearily, relocking the door. "I haven't slept more than four hours at a time for — I don't know how long. Those fellows who were just here came in with a delegation from one of the out-townships to take part in the parade to-night. They've got a drum corps, and wanted a little money with which to buy muslin for transparencies advertising the splendid qualities of Dickson. Of course I had to produce the money, though I don't believe that 'something warm' on the transparencies will influence a soul. But a refusal to give them a dollar would probably have cost me half a dozen votes in that township. They would set me down as a 'cheap skate,' and would not vote at all for representative if they didn't vote for the other fellow. That's a cheap way to buy votes, and yet any one of that crowd would fight you in a minute if you should hint that his vote could be influenced."

"Rather a queer situation," remarked Wayne.

"It's politics," replied Dickson.

They went down to supper and found the hotel lobby filled with men gathered in small groups, most of them talking earnestly in low tones, while occasionally one would jot down some figures and hand them to the others for inspection. The clerk was flurried with the crush of business, and his incessant pounding of the call-bell kept the porters on the jump. Clouds of cigar smoke made the atmosphere hazy, and the smell of burning tobacco was not unmingled with the pungent odor of whiskey. Dickson shook hands right and left, jesting merrily the while, waving his hand and shouting words of greeting to others in remote corners of the lobby, and intermingling all of it with terse introductions of Wayne to those about him. They had zigzagged their way to the dining-room door, when a man suddenly detached himself from a laughing group and lurched unsteadily towards them. A felt hat, battered and dusty, sat sidewise on his head, and his fox-like face carried a week's growth of beard. He plucked Dickson by the arm.

"Jus' a minute, Dave," he said, blinking uncertainly.

Dickson frowned. "I'm in a hurry, 'Tammany,'" he replied.

The other laughed in a foolish way. "Bet yer life ye recognize old Tammany, don't ye, Dave? Huh? Bet yer life ye do. Jus' wanted to tell ye it's all right. Tammany's got Taylor Township in his vest-pocket, and she's yours to-morrow. Dern

'em, they throwed me out of a precinct caucus the other night, an' I told 'em I'd turn the township over to Dickson, an' by hell she's yours. Huh? Ain't I the Tammany of Taylor Township? Huh? Damn right I am. Got 'em in my vest-pocket. Old Tammany — ”

“ Yes, yes, I know you can deliver the goods all right. I'll see you after supper.” Dickson moved towards the door, but “ Tammany ” caught his arm once more and began trying to whisper maudlin confidences to him. Dickson again broke loose, and as he and Wayne started for their seats, the unsteady one called after them:

“ Jus' watch Tammany's smoke. Got Taylor Township in my ves'-pocket, an' I'll show 'em the tiger's claws to-morrow. Make 'em dern sorry they put me out. Tammany's hell when he's loose. Huh? ” He took off his hat, scratched his head in an uncertain way, and then wobbled towards a group of politicians, who dispersed as he approached, and then reassembled in another corner, leaving the outraged “ Tammany ” looking stupidly about in the odorous haze.

“ He's one of the characters always on hand at a rally,” said Dickson. “ He's naturally smart, but a little booze makes a different man out of him, and he imagines himself a power in politics.”

“ I am becoming more and more uncertain as to whether a preacher should keep away from politics or whether more of them should dive in and attempt to purify things,” said Wayne.

"It's a question that I won't attempt to answer," said Dickson, and then, with a sigh, he turned his attention to his supper.

He did not seem disposed to be talkative, and Wayne humored his mood, contenting himself with watching the play of emotions on his face. Dickson appeared weary, and lines were deepening on his forehead, while his eyes seemed to have shrunk from his brows. Once a drum somewhere out on the street rattled, and a shadow flitted across the candidate's face. The price Dickson was paying was far greater than his possible reward, it seemed to the preacher.

After supper the two went to the campaign headquarters, and there they found more men, more smoke, and more whiskey scents. A drum corps was in the back room practising with the fifers, while in one corner of the chairman's office a negro quartette were holding their heads close together and droning with many minors the words of campaign songs which they were to hurl at the crowd that night. The county chairman shook hands with them, and said something which was lost in the rattle of the drums and the shriek of the fife. Crosby, realizing that his voice had proved unequal to the occasion, took a deep breath and bawled out in stentorian tones: "I say she's goin' to be a whooper to-night!"

At that moment there was a deafening explosion in front of the building and the glass rattled. A weak cheer arose.

"It's the factory men's cannon," explained Dickson, as the drums quieted a moment. "They have an organization, and made the cannon themselves for campaign purposes. Some one stole it once, and for two years it remained hidden, but our fellows found it a week ago, and they're going to turn her loose to-night."

Another roar sounded in the street, and then the drums crashed once more, and now the corps was passing down the stairway to join the crowd in front, and to attract others. There was to be a big parade, and the chairman was busy arranging for the start. A band reported and was assigned a place in the column, and then out-townships one after another reported their delegations, and in half an hour all was ready. A barouche drove up to the curb, and Wayne, Dickson, Crosby, and one of the prominent citizens took seats in the vehicle. The drummers and the cannoneers had left the spot to take the places assigned them, and comparative quiet reigned. The driver spoke to his steeds, and as the tugs tightened the strains of a violin were heard, and a childish voice arose:

"Way down upon the Suwanee —"

The words were lost, but Wayne glancing quickly over his shoulder saw the blind violinist and boy singer that had attracted his attention on a previous visit to Riverside. And then he suddenly sprang to his feet and shouted to the driver to stop. A woman stood close beside the child, and

his swift glance had shown him the face of Lorraine Wilson. The driver reined in his horses sharply, but Wayne had already regretted his impulsive action. His brain was harboring strange fancies, he told himself, and the image of Lorraine had reflected from his heart. That was all, he said.

"What's the matter, Wayne?" asked Dickson, anxiously.

"A foolish fancy. Tell the driver to go ahead," was the preacher's reply. "I thought I saw a certain person whom I know is miles from here. My action was foolish in the extreme."

They reached their place and soon the column moved. Bands played and drum corps labored vigorously, while ever and anon the marching clubs would shout their rhythmic slogans. A plentiful supply of Roman candles along the line sent fiery balls of iridescent hues spurting into the night. The factory men had their cannon on a wagon, and the march was punctuated by the crash of its discharge. Transparencies dotted the line and bobbed about like corks on an angry sea. The words on these were received with hand-clappings and cheers, or by derisive groans and bitter taunts, according to the political sympathies of those who lined the streets on either side to see the closing demonstration of a remarkable campaign.

At length the theatre was reached, and Wayne was escorted to a seat in the centre of the flag-bedecked stage. About forty prominent citizens and pioneers of the party were already seated on

the stage, and as he approached they eyed him critically. It was plain that they had their doubts about him. Paragraph, Hausman, and Ward were there and nodded their encouragement. Finally an old man arose and came towards him, thumping the stage with a cane as he walked. Bowing before the preacher, he gave the stage an extra thump with his cane, and said he wished to welcome him.

“I have no doubt you have often heard of me. My name’s Purdy, generally called Father Purdy, sir. I was present at the birth of the Republican party, and, egad, sir, I have been prominent in politics all of my life. I am not vain, but, sir, I must say that I have been prominent in the councils of this grand party. We had our doubts, sir, about a preacher being the man to close this campaign, but Dickson’s no fool, and we agreed to try you. And, sir, I want to say that I believe that you’ll make a good speech. I can tell by looking at a man, egad I can, sir.” He shook hands solemnly and in a dignified manner, and then thumped back to his chair.

The theatre filled rapidly, but Wayne forgot the fact. He was thinking about the blind violinist and the boy — and of his fancy. Then he seemed to hear Joe whispering that all of them would be thinking of him that night, and he wondered if it were true, if Lorraine had given him a thought, or whether all of her thoughts were for the man who lay at death’s portals as the result of a knife wound. The brilliantly lighted theatre faded away,

and he sat again in the farmhouse and heard her playing soft chords on the organ in accompaniment to half-murmured songs that flowed dreamily from her lips. Could it be that, after all, she loved Jim Gordon? She had approved of his treatment of Gordon in the row over the gypsy, but perhaps her affections came and went like the tides; perhaps — but he told himself that he was doing her an injustice. He did not know the secrets of her heart, but he knew that hers was not an inconstant nature. He knew —

“ . . . And now I have the honor and the pleasure of introducing Mr. Robert Wayne, who will address you.”

Wayne dimly heard the words and saw the speaker turn towards him with a gesture. He heard Purdy's cane thumping applause on the stage floor, and became conscious of the fact that the preliminary exercises were over and that he had been introduced. He rubbed his eyes, but he saw the eyes of the prominent men turned inquiringly towards him, and he realized that he must act. Hastily he arose to his feet and stepped to the front of the stage. A storm of applause greeted him, the cane of Purdy hammering like mad. He was dazed and totally at loss for words. The applause died away, but still his thoughts were scattered and he stood dumb. There was a moment of suspense; he cleared his throat and vainly tried to pick up the thread of his speech. He felt the blood mounting to his temples, but at that instant there

was a thundering roar just outside the theatre, and the voice of the factory cannon shook the windows. It was Wayne's salvation. A ripple of laughter went over the audience, and he laughed also. The spell was broken; he was again himself. He heard Joe whispering, "We'll be thinking of you to-night, Bob, — *all* of us." He found his tongue and in a moment was into his speech. For an hour he spoke, and did his best to obey the injunction of Crosby to "give 'em word-painting and sweep 'em off their feet." And right well did he succeed, the bursts of applause coming more and more frequently, until, as he closed, with a peroration that was a gem of eloquence, — and a desert of solid facts, — the building shook with cheers, and the factory men hastily loaded their cannon and fired it in the theatre lobby.

The prominent men crowded about to shake his hand, and old Purdy thumped the toes of a dozen people in an effort to show his appreciation. Hausman, Paragraph, and Ward were in the crowd, slapping him on the shoulder and congratulating him. Dickson cracked the bones in the preacher's hand, and his voice was husky as he said:

"You've elected me, Wayne, and I'll never forget. I've got to 'shake the bushes' all night, and I suppose I'll have to say good-by now, as you won't care to join in political games."

"No, I'll go to the hotel and wash my hands. I've been playing in the mud."

Dickson smiled. Then he reached out his hand once more, and, as he held the preacher's palm in his, he repeated:

"I'll never forget, Wayne. I'll never forget."

CHAPTER XVI.

SERVED THE WARRANT

WHEN the train pulled into Craigville the next morning, Wayne's companions breathed easy for the first time in hours.

"It would have been just our luck if the train had jumped the track and smashed us up so we couldn't vote," said Ward.

They went down the street and met groups of men on the sidewalk talking earnestly, and saw men sneaking out from the rear of a saloon. A long rope stretched along one side of a walk marked a voting-place. The day was raw and blustery, and small fires had been kindled by the challengers and poll-book holders, over which they crouched and cracked dismal jokes. Party workers drove away from the voting-places in great haste, only to return with a voter who had been "seen." On a corner a negro, conspicuous by a rabbit-skin cap and a red flannel vest, strummed a home-made banjo, and in a tuneless voice shouted rambling songs.

"When God made a nigger
He made him in the night,
And made him in such a hurry
He forgot to make him white."

He plunked the old banjo and shuffled his feet in a measureless dance. A guffaw of laughter rewarded him, and, giving the strings an extra twang, he threw back his head and shouted:

“Election comes and I must go —
Um-m-m, ah, Billy Bryan —
Pick a tune on the old banjo,
While the votes are flyin’.
McKinley says, ‘Keep open the mills’ —
Um-m-m, ah, Billy Bryan —
‘Your silver gives me the chills,’ —
Just hear this coon a-sighin’.”

It was evident that some candidate had heard that “coon a-sighin’,” for, as he finished his song, a man stepped up to him and said something to him in a low tone, and a few minutes later the singer followed the man up a stairway.

“That coon will come down armed with a carbon envelope,” said Paragraph, with a laugh, as they passed on.

Wayne did not reply for a moment. Finally he said: “I’ll have to confess that I don’t understand the carbon envelope.”

The editor smiled. “Just a Hoosier way of beating the Australian system,” he said. “The floater is given a sealed envelope containing a sheet of carbon-paper over the Republican and Democratic emblems. The man who sells his vote must fit his ballot over the envelope when he makes his cross in the circle around the party emblem, and the carbon-paper in the envelope records the mark on the slip beneath. When the ‘floater’ goes to

collect his money, he delivers the envelope record, showing that he voted as he agreed."

"I guess I don't know much about politics," said Wayne.

"You were reared in a different atmosphere, no doubt," was the reply. "That's only one of the many tricks devised to help the vote-buyer triumph over the Australian system."

Hausman had gone to the hotel, and Ward had been called to look after a drunken rowdy who was making himself obnoxious about the voting-places, and now Paragraph excused himself and hurried to the office. Joe had promised to meet Wayne at the depot with the buggy, and had failed to appear, but the preacher was not surprised. He had learned that in Indiana politics had right of way over everything else.

"Hi, there!" A voice hailed him from the opposite side of the street, and he saw Jap Munson's red head bobbing at him. "Haven't got a minute to talk to you, Parson," he said, darting across the street and coiling the lash of his black-snake. "I'm in an awful rush this morning, I tell you, but I just wanted to tell you that I was readin' in the paper awhile ago about what a rip snortin' speech you made up to Riverside last night. Old Father Purdy was interviewed by the reporter, and said it was the best speech he had heard since he was present at the birth of the party."

The preacher laughed. "I met Purdy, and he thumped me on the toes with his cane," he said.

"But I had forgotten to look at the morning paper."

Munson flicked his whip at a dead leaf. "Say, Parson," he said, "I was just wonderin' if you'd do me a favor."

"Why, of —"

"Now hold on. Wife's got something this morning, I forget what it is, and — oh, yes, it's some kind of a paralysis threatenin' her arm — she wanted me to hurry back with some medicine for her. I'd like to have you take it over for me when you go out home."

"Why, of course, Jap. Is she very much indisposed?"

Munson grinned. "Not dangerous, I guess," he said. "I left her worrying the hogs and quarrelin' with the chickens. But you know I am full of business to-day. The darned skunks played a mean trick on us last night. We had three voters living in a little shack on the precinct line, and last night a gang got 'em drunk, and then, after puttin' them to bed, put trucks under the house, hitched a couple of teams to it, and pulled it across the road into another precinct. This morning they challenged their votes because they hadn't lived in the precinct long enough. Said they had moved the night before election." He swung the whip about his head and popped it viciously. "If I knew for certain who done the movin', I'd bite 'em with my blacksnake."

"How are things going?"

"I wish you'd tell me. Never saw an election as hard to figure on. The subsidy business is a goner, though, I can tell you that."

"And how about the trustee?"

Munson coiled his whip again. "Parson, they're makin' me hump," he said, solemnly. "That's all I know. But I'm in an awful rush." He pulled a bottle from his pocket. "Here's that medicine for my wife — and, by jing! I must send a plaster out for — for — one of the kids, I forget which. Wife says she just knows he's takin' pneumonia." He darted into a near-by drug store and shortly reappeared with the plaster. "Tell wife I won't be home until after the polls close," he said, and hurried away in pursuit of a voter.

Wayne watched the ebb and flow of politics for a time, but the bleakness of the day depressed him; the old struggle between heart and the Cross was raging. Every fibre of his being worshiped Lorraine Wilson, the woman whom he alone, perhaps, knew to be the lawful wife of another. That she did not love the man to whom she was wedded he well knew, but was not her heart given to Gordon? Pity is akin to love, and adversity woos the heart of sympathy. Certainly Gordon's condition was such as to appeal to a concealed and smouldering love, if such existed. It was with delight that he saw Joe driving towards him.

"I've been busier than Jap Munson," said the young farmer. "Let's drive around past the drug

store. I want to get a paper so I can read about your speech."

"Oh, I can tell you all about it on the road home," said Wayne. "I'm chilled through. It's a sorry day, sure."

"But I have orders from Lorraine to buy a paper. She said she wanted to see you in print as others see you."

A warm wave rolled from the preacher's heart, and he was silent until Joe drove to the drug store and then turned towards home, after securing the paper. They talked about the election and about Wayne's experiences in the county capital, and Joe laughed heartily at the preacher's description of "Tammany" and old man Purdy. Wayne even tried to imitate the negro banjoist's rendition of "Um-m-m, ah, Billy Bryan." He shouted merry greetings to those they met on the way, and interspersed his chatter with bits of college songs that made Joe's eyes glisten.

"Those songs appeal to me, Bob," he said. "They remind me of what I have missed, though. But it seems to me you are in better humor than when I picked you up. Getting thawed out?"

Wayne gave a simple "yes" in reply, but he might have continued with the explanation that the knowledge of Lorraine's interest had been the force that softened the temperature, brightened the skies, and "thawed him out."

They drove up to the home place, and the faithful old dog came bounding out to meet them. The

old man greeted Wayne in his kindly manner, and his wife inquired solicitously if he had had breakfast.

"Anything new in Riverside?" asked the Major.

Wayne smiled. "Not unless there is something new in politics," he said. "From the time I got off the train until I got back, I breathed politics, ate figures, and drank caucuses. There isn't much sense to that statement, but it's about my experience."

"And how about Dickson?"

"Says he's going to be elected, and says I helped him, but I don't want any more of it. I feel some of the slime clinging to me yet. It's a relief to get back to the place once more, but I must drive on over to Munson's and deliver this medicine for Jap." He stood around a moment, talking at random with the old man, but with his eyes and ears on the alert for Lorraine. However, she did not appear, and he drove away to Munson's. After delivering the medicine, he hastened back to the Wilson place.

As he stepped up on the porch again, he heard the sound of the organ and Lorraine's voice raised in song. He entered the house, and then walked directly to the little parlor. As he stepped into the room, the song hushed, and as she looked up, startled, a flush dyed her cheeks.

"I would like to hear the remainder of the song," he said, rather awkwardly.

"Your coming was so unexpected that it frightened the tune away," she said, smiling.

"A regular bogy man on tunes, am I?"

"Never mind the tune. I congratulate you on your Riverside success. The morning paper says, 'The Hon. Robert Wayne closed the speaking campaign with a flood of eloquence that swept his hearers off their feet and kept them constantly applauding.'"

"I haven't read the paper yet. Did it say I 'mesmerized 'em?'"

She looked at him doubtfully. "N-o-o, I don't think so."

He laughed at her mystification. "Crosby told me to, and I was wondering if I had obeyed orders." Then his manner suddenly changed. "You weren't in Riverside last night, were you?"

"Why, certainly not — except in thought."

He caught his breath sharply and the hand he rested on the organ trembled. "Do you mean — that — that you were thinking about — my speech?"

She turned the leaves of the music and struck a chord on the instrument. "Why, Joe kept talking about you all the time." She touched another chord, and he turned from the organ and walked towards the door. "But why did you ask if I was in Riverside?" she added.

"Just a whim of a distorted fancy. For a moment I would have sworn that I saw you."

He turned again towards the door, but there was

a queer sound in the girl's throat, and he looked around in time to see her music fall to the floor. White and trembling she had arisen to her feet and stood clutching the edge of the organ.

"You thought — you — saw — *me* in Riverside?" she asked, a halt in her speech.

"Yes, and I stopped the carriage a moment. But of course I realized my mistake and drove on."

She sat down and gave utterance to a peal of laughter which Wayne could not help believing was a trifle nervous and considerable of an effort.

"Come back a moment, Mr. Wayne, and tell me all about myself. What did I do after you saw me, and what was I doing when you saw me?"

"It was only a glimpse," he replied. "Why should you give it heed?"

"Oh, no reason in the world, except that one is always interested in one's self, of course. Sometimes I am a bit superstitious, and when you first spoke I was startled. I haven't been very strong lately. No doubt my school work is wearing on me. Ever since Jim Gordon was stabbed, my nerves have been on a razor edge. You enjoyed your trip, I hope."

"I was not completely happy until I stepped out of the buggy at the Wilson place."

Once more the color stole to her cheeks, but she did not reply. A sudden gust of wind rattled the window fiercely and sent a cloud of dead leaves whirling across the yard.

"A day in keeping with life," he said, after a

moment of silence. "An unseen force clutches at our souls and shakes our purposes, even as the wind's rough but unseen clutch shakes the windows. And then the skeletons of the past, all our mistakes and good resolves that withered, go whirling before our eyes, riding on that same phantom force."

"You are in a melancholy mood," she said, arising and going to a window.

"Perhaps. At least, I am honest. There comes a time in every man's life when his spirit droops and he longs to lay down his burdens, to be once more just himself, himself as he used to be, free from mask and from the coarse fibres that have crept into his life with the years. He has lived in the world of hearts, he turns to the promise of the Cross, and he longs to be understood; but, though the winds of desire and remorse rack him, he seeks in vain for words with which to portray that which is in his soul. He must go to the Cross and 'tell it to the Lord in prayer.'"

"I believe, Mr. Wayne, that your nerves are also unstrung. Perhaps —"

He stopped her with a gesture. "I know what you would say — that I should rest up. It's what they all say when a man's soul is tattered. But it's not so! What I need is more work to dull the brain!" His voice had grown harsh, and his words came like the lash of angry seas, but suddenly his teeth clicked hard, and then he bowed before her. "I beg pardon," he said, "I did not

mean to be rude, but I spoke truly. When I was a boy, a visit to the circus would fill me with a vague and restless longing to live always in the world that glittered, with the strains of music in my ears, but a plunge into hard work always brought surcease. I have been standing like a child in a self-conjured world of glittering delights, and now it is work I need."

"Well, a man ought to find plenty of that on a farm," said a voice from the doorway, and, turning, they saw the Major.

"Mr. Wayne has taken a glimpse into the world that glitters, — the world to which he was born, — and now he feels his innermost nature crying out against our dull life on the farm." It was Lorraine who spoke.

"Wrong, I assure you," responded the preacher, impulsively. "I have come back to the spot I hold most dear, but it is because I feel that I soon must go out into the beating, struggling world that discontent is gnawing at me. I love the Wabash; I love the honest, true-hearted people of this community, because here I have found both hearts and the Cross, and

"Whatever may come, come joy, come woe,
My refuge forever, forever is here.'"

He did not sing the words, but they tripped from his tongue as though welling from his heart. The old man glanced at Lorraine, but her face was away from him, and he could not see the pallor that stole

the color from her cheeks as the words of the old song fell from the preacher's lips.

"That song was a favorite of mine, Mr. Wayne — long ago," said the old man, and another glance stole towards Lorraine. "I am glad you like our humble community, and I am sorry you talk of leaving. Yet we cannot hope to keep you bound here."

"It would be a glorious bondage," replied Wayne, and then, noting the pallor still in the girl's face, he suddenly turned towards the door. "I must get my Sunday sermon under way," he said.

He was half-way up the stairs when the old man stepped to the door. "Parson," he called, "would you be kind enough to talk once more about the 'Rose and the Thorn?' I think you are right — that the quality of forgiveness is the greatest glory that can enter into the life of man." His hand rested on the banister rail, and a tear stole down his wrinkled cheek.

"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee."

The sweet voice of the mother came to them, enriched with the quaver of many chastening years. The old man's head bowed lower until it touched his arm.

"Leave, oh, leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me."

Wayne stood looking down on the bowed head a moment, and then tiptoed to his room to fall

on his knees. And when he looked up, the clouds had parted and a beam of sunshine had peeped in at the window.

During the afternoon he labored in the woods pasture, swinging an axe with lusty will, "dulling memory and stifling thought." Men drove rapidly up and down the near-by highway, and occasionally one would hitch his horse and climb the fences to solicitously inquire if he had voted. When informed that he was not eligible to vote, they speedily lost interest in him, and remarked that they "must be a-going." But as the afternoon waned, the solicitous ones who paused to query remained long enough to assure him that the subsidy proposition had gone down in defeat. That was common ground on which all met to rejoice. Aside from that, the news from the political battle-fields was uncertain in its tenor. Jap Munson was in dire straits, every one agreed on that; Dickson had a fighting chance to carry the township, and it looked as though McKinley would carry the township. The Dunkards were voting in greater numbers than ever before, and the Republicans confidently claimed that these votes were going for McKinley. The Congressional ticket was in doubt, telephone messages from county headquarters stating that both parties claimed Tyler County by snug majorities for the Congressional ticket. But steadily swung the axe, and the pile of wood for consumption during the long winter near at hand grew in proportion.

"He's a bully good fellow, preacher or no

preacher," said one caller to his companion, after leaving the chopper.

"Yep," assented the other. Then, after a moment's deliberation, he added: "But he ought to take more interest in politics."

The November night came on early, and the lamps were lighted before time for supper. A fire crackled and glowed in the big sheet-iron stove, and before it sat Wayne, silent. He had wearied the body, but his brain was not dulled. A gust of wind wailed at the window, and he thought of the Sunday when he and Lorraine had been caught in the woods by the storm. He recalled the brief time he had spent alone with her in the deserted sugar-camp, while the tempest raged about them. Here of late he had brooded much over the past. The future he refused to consider. When he looked up, the Major was standing at his side, an open letter in his hand. "I have just received a reply from the expert for whom I sent to examine your iron discovery. He will be here next week."

"I presume that Ormand has not sent any more agents to you with a view of purchasing the ground."

The old man smiled. "No," he said, "I guess you decided that question for him."

Wayne nodded. The firelight played on his features and they looked haggard. "I think I decided two or three questions for him," he said.

Lorraine came in, her cheeks glowing red where the wind had kissed them. "I was reading in the

paper that the goose-bone prediction was for an early winter," she said, deftly tucking back a stray wisp of hair that autumn had torn from its place. "If it keeps on as it has begun, we'll have a white Thanksgiving." Her face lighted up with sudden happiness. "I'm a regular snow-bird, Mr. Wayne. If we could just have a white Thanksgiving, it would seem like the old days when we were all at home, and —" She stopped short, and the color flamed deeper in her cheeks for an instant and then slowly receded until a gray pallor was there. The old man stood stiffly erect, and one bony hand swept back the mass of silvered hair from his brow.

"Lorraine," and his voice sounded cold, "I think I heard your mother calling."

She flashed a lightning glance at the preacher, and then, bowing her head, left the room silently, leaving Wayne groping blindly for an explanation.

"The goose-bone and the corn-husk prognostications are always on duty in Indiana at this season of the year," said the Major, after an interval of silence.

"Yes," replied Wayne, simply, and continued gazing into the fire.

The old man walked to the window and peered out into the darkness. He turned again to the man by the fire. "You do not believe in signs, do you?"

Wayne looked at him steadily for a moment. "No," he said, musingly. "And yet I should, in a measure, at least. Once I dreamed that an angel had pointed me to the Cross, and —"

“McKinley carried this township all right!” exclaimed Joe, suddenly bursting into the room. He spread his hand to the cheerful warmth and continued: “You ought to see the Dunkards voting. Never saw them turn out so before on election day.”

The sudden interruption broke the tension on Wayne’s nerves, and he laughed aloud. “So even you have the political fever, have you?” He spoke banteringly.

“Sh-h-h! This is one of the times I am trying to be a loyal citizen — according to the Indiana interpretation.”

“Which means?”

“Look wise around the voting-places and get an ear full.”

There was a call to supper, and the campaign and its close furnished the theme of conversation. Once Wayne mentioned the prospects for snow on Thanksgiving, but, with what seemed to him undue haste, Lorraine asked if he intended going to town to hear the election returns. “They always make up a purse for a telegraphic report,” she said.

The preacher went to his room soon after supper, and the fragrance of tobacco smoke crept down the stairs. He was working on his sermon, but at abstracted intervals the smoke seemed to hang hazy between him and the Cross. But he clung to duty, and gradually peace stole into his soul, and he found his pen too slow to catch the sermon that gushed unsought and unlabored from his heart and brain. It

had not been his custom to write his sermons, but of late he had taken warning of his moods of abstraction, and, fearing that he might stand in the pulpit with no words at his command, while his thoughts rioted away in pursuit of forbidden fancies, he had resolved to have manuscript ever before him. And now it was finished. Leaning back in his chair he closed his eyes in weariness; the moaning of the wind crooned a lullaby to him, and he slept. He awoke with a start. Voices were heard below, and, as he rubbed his eyes, he caught the familiar "You hear me; you hear *me*," of Jap Munson.

He went down and found Munson standing before the fire, dejection stamped on his countenance. He gave the preacher a curt nod.

"Fresh from the battle-field, I suppose, Jap; tell me the news — trustee first," said Wayne.

"Everything's gone to thunder — beg pardon, Lorry." He caught himself and looked appealingly at the girl, who gave him a smile.

"Jap Munson's name is mud in this election," he continued, gloomily. "Beat me by two votes. Beat me by a derved, ornery (he looked beseechingly at Lorraine again and she laughed) trick. Hitched teams to that shack, and moved three of our voters out of the precinct while they was drunk — and after we had been keeping them in meat and flour for three months, too. It's a der — ahem (he stopped suddenly and cleared his throat) — I mean it's a low-down Shenanigan trick!"

“And how about the rest of the ticket?”

“Guess they didn’t know Bryan was on the ticket in this township. The Dunkards got him. If the rest of the country acted the same way, and a telephone message from Riverside said it looked that way, McKinley will be emperor of this country and we’ll have a soldier roostin’ on every fence post.” He had held his blacksnake in his hand, but it fell to the floor now, and he gave it a vicious kick. “Just a-goin’ by on my way home and thought I’d tell you about it.” He picked up his whip and started for the door. “Hope I won’t find wife down with smallpox nor any of the kids paralyzed,” he said.

“Well, well, Jap,” said the Major, kindly, “politics has many disappointments.”

“Politics has many liars,” said the defeated one, pausing.

“An election is hard to judge,” continued the old man, “and not always the best man wins.”

“I’ve been to dozens of speakings this campaign,” said Munson, his hand on the door, “and if all the fellows who were there and split their lungs cheerin’ had voted as they cheered, there wouldn’t have been an election in this township—simply a Democratic ratification. But I’ve learned that a man mustn’t be deceived and puffed up by applause, for the average American whoops it up strong in order to get all he can for nothing.”

He went out into the darkness, walking slowly, as though reluctant to reach the end of his journey.

They listened for the pop of his blacksnake, but it was not heard.

Two days later Wayne received a letter from Dickson, telling him that he had carried the county by a handsome plurality, and reiterating that he would "never forget." The same afternoon Paragraph and Susanna paid them a visit, the editor bringing with him the glad tidings that the official canvass of the vote had brought to light an error in the vote for trustee, and that Jap Munson was declared elected by one vote.

"How fares the *Star*?" asked Joe.

"Circulation has doubled since I got married. You see, I can use wood, groceries, etc., just the same as cash, and now that I've got a home, the people feel that I am going to last, and that the paper will not be a shooting *Star*. Wayne, how is Jim Gordon?"

"I was there early this morning, but was refused admittance. They said no one was to see him, but I know others have been in. To be frank, I think my presence is not desired there. Gordon and I were not very friendly, you know."

"Yes — I know." Paragraph's words were low and halting, and he drummed his fingers on the window-pane. The others were in another part of the room now, and the editor leaned towards Wayne and asked: "Parson, did you ever have trouble with Jim Gordon more than once?"

The minister hesitated. "Yes," he said, finally. "I met him in the woods once and he threatened

me. I told him I had found a thistle in the field and named it Jim Gordon, and that if I ever found it in my path again I would crush it."

Paragraph sat down by the fire, and, after an awkward silence, he remarked that it was glorious, the manner in which Willow Township had defeated the subsidy proposition. "The other company has completed its survey and has secured the right of way. The grading will be commenced early in the spring, and we can ride to the State fair on the electric line next fall."

The weeks crept by, bringing but few changes to the neighborhood. The wild goose had long days before honked its lonesome way southward across leaden skies, and one morning when Wayne awoke he found the familiar landscape altered by a heavy fall of snow, for December had chalked its name in chilled letters on the calendar. Jap Munson had renewed his faith in politics after the report of the canvassing board, and had begun making inquiries concerning the destitute families in his jurisdiction. The expert had come down from Chicago, and, after inspecting the rocky ledge carefully, had given it as his opinion that, while iron undoubtedly was to be found there, it was not in paying quantities. And so the secret of the hillside slept beneath the caress of Boreas.

The news from Jim Gordon's room was meagre. A physician from a distance — no one knew just where — was in attendance, and day by day callers

were turned away from the door with the uncertain information that Jim was "getting along all right." But John Ormand came frequently, and for him there was always an invitation to visit the patient.

A blinding snow-storm swept down from the northwest and drove Wayne from his labors in the woods. And riding in the teeth of the storm came Ward, the marshal. Alighting stiffly from the saddle, he declined the chore-boy's suggestion that the horse be put in the barn.

"Let him stand," he said. "Maybe he won't be here long, and — well, it won't hurt him to stand awhile."

He went up to the porch and stood there stamping the snow from his shoes. The preacher swung open the door.

"Come in, man," he said. "Never mind the snow."

"In a minute. I was just thinking about my horse. You see where he's tied, don't you, Parson?"

"Why, yes, and I was wondering why you did not put him in the barn."

Ward stamped his feet again and glanced at the speaker. "Oh, just because — well, I might want to hurry back to town if the storm gets worse, you know, and — and — he's easy reached there. I tied him so that if a man is in a hurry one pull at the knot will free the reins. He's the swiftest horse in the county, too, and was never tired in his life."

By this time he had entered the house and was

standing looking about, apparently ill at ease. Wayne drew a chair to the fire and motioned to it, but Ward shook his head.

"Much obliged, Parson, but I don't care to sit. Where's the Major and Joe?"

"Gone to Craigville with some corn. Anything I can do for you, Ward?"

"No, I guess not." He walked to the window and looked out. "If a fellow I was after should ever get a-straddle of that horse yonder, he'd get away sure, Parson."

Wayne laughed. "It's queer you don't take better care of him, then. That storm is hard on the poor beast."

"Yes, yes, I know it, I know it," hastily replied the marshal. Then he added: "Say, Parson, you don't mind, do you, if I step out to the pump. I—I like water right from the well."

"Certainly not. There's a tin on the pump."

The marshal nodded, and, as he pulled his coat about him, he clumsily dropped a paper from his pocket and then strode towards the door.

"Here's a paper you dropped, Ward," called the preacher, picking it up from the floor.

Ward paused, but did not turn his head. "I'm going after a drink, Parson. If any paper is of any interest to you, read it while I'm drinking." He opened the door and went out.

Wayne sat staring after him in wonder. He had never heard of Ward being under the influence of liquor, yet his present actions and words could

not be credited to any other reason. Then he glanced at the paper he held in his hand, and turned it over. As he did so, his glance caught his own name written there. He spread the paper open, and, as his eyes drank in its contents, the color faded from his cheeks and his breath came quick. What he held in his hand was a warrant for his arrest. He laid it down, then snatched it up again, and slowly read it aloud, a warrant charging him with assault and battery on Jim Gordon with intent to commit murder!

What did it mean? Surely no one could believe that he had struck down Jim Gordon! And then he remembered that there was circumstantial evidence that might be twisted into unpleasant forms by a lawyer. Now it all came to him, why he had been so curtly received at Gordon's, and why so much secrecy was maintained around Gordon's room. "George Morse's work!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet and pacing the room. The door-knob rattled and then Ward came back into the room. He glanced at the preacher and then deliberately turned his back and went to the window.

"I can't help thinking about that horse out there," he said, without looking around. "He can't be caught, I tell you. And, come to think of it, I left a little chamois sack containing one hundred dollars in greenbacks tied to the saddle-horn. Guess I'll go get another drink. Never was so dry in my life."

He turned towards the door again, but Wayne sprang forward and caught his arm.

"Ward! In God's name explain this!" He held the warrant before him with shaking hand, but the marshal craned his neck, and, ignoring the preacher's words, looked out the window again.

"Never was so dry — but the horse ain't. He's in prime condition for a run."

He tried to pull away, but Wayne clung to his arm.

"Drop it, Ward!" he exclaimed. "I understand now. You've been trying to let me run away on your horse. But I will not! Serve your warrant!"

Ward turned towards him and looked steadily into his eyes. "I haven't served any warrant yet, have I?" he asked.

"No, no, — but you must, I tell you!" He held the paper towards the marshal, but Ward folded his arms without touching it.

"Parson, I — can't do it! Yonder's my horse, and there's money on the saddle. Take this chance and go!"

"Again I refuse. Why do you do this?"

The marshal unfolded his arms, and one hand made a quick wipe at a tear that had escaped his eyes.

"Once there was a little girl — and — a — mad dog. And — a man —"

Wayne stopped him with a gesture. "And for that you would turn your back on duty?" he asked.

"For that I would brave hell if I could serve the man!" His head was thrown back and his eyes were flashing. "Parson," he added, "by the love I bear that little girl, I beg you to take my horse."

The preacher gripped the marshal's hand, but, as he clung to it, he said: "I cannot — will not — do it. I am not guilty."

"If it was only that — a question of guilt or innocence — I wouldn't have urged you to go. But violence sometimes is quicker than law."

"I accept all chances. And now I want to know who is back of all this."

"And I cannot tell you. All I know is that the warrant was given me to serve. I would have refused and resigned, but I thought I could do you more good by taking charge of the paper."

"I'll saddle another horse and go with you at once."

"And the women folks — what of them?"

The pallor deepened in the preacher's cheeks, but his voice remained steady. "I'll explain that I was called away on business and will not return to-night. After I've seen Joe and the Major, they can tell the folks here."

In a short time they were riding away from the Wilson place. The storm was still raging, and they rode in silence. Finally the marshal reined close in beside his companion (he refused to consider him his prisoner) and said:

"The jail at Riverside burned down last week, you know, and I am supposed to keep — prisoners



Howells' Illustrations

AS THEY REACHED THE TOP OF A HILL HE PAUSED A MOMENT AND TURNED IN HIS SADDLE.

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— in the Craigville calaboose, but you'll stay at my house."

The preacher raised his eyes, and the look that was mirrored therein caused Ward to forget the blizzard for a time. But Wayne offered no thanks. His heart was too full.

As they reached the top of a hill he paused a moment and turned in his saddle. Night was fast closing down, but far away across the waste of snow and bleak barrenness he could see the faint outlines of the Wilson place. Well he knew that it was at this point where the last view could be had on the way to town. And now, as he looked, a sudden gleam of light flashed from one of the windows, and an odd fancy seized him that it was a beacon beaming hope to him across a winter of despair. Then he settled himself in the saddle and rode on, the sting of the snow pellets in his face and the biting cold lash of the wind about his ears.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MOB

THE news of Wayne's arrest caused a whirlwind of discussion in the township. Major Wilson for once forgot his dignity and raged about like a madman, declaring the entire affair a conspiracy and an outrage. Generous, impulsive Joe said that he would demand an explanation from Jim Gordon, but when he flung his bridle-reins over a post and strode up to the house, he was firmly informed that Gordon could not be seen. The doctor was with him and had advised perfect quiet.

Jap Munson drove to the office of the *Craigville Star* and fairly ran up the stairs, bursting into the office with an impetuosity that caused Paragraph to spring from his chair in alarm. Munson slammed the door and then turned to the editor.

"Well, it's come!" he shouted.

No explanation of his meaning was needed. Paragraph nodded. "Yes," he said, "it's come. But sit down, Jap." He whirled a chair towards his caller and then resumed his seat.

"Thunder and lightning, this is no time to wear

out chairs!" exclaimed Munson, excitedly pacing the floor.

"This is a time for calmness and deliberate planning," responded Miller, quietly. "You showed yourself to be shrewd when you played a little joke on a pair of bloodhounds. Don't spoil your good record now."

"But it's a lie and an injustice, and I can't sit still while the Parson is in trouble. I'd like to black-snake Gordon out of the township."

The editor pulled a pencil from his pocket, and after deliberately breaking off the point, calmly and carefully sharpened it again before replying.

"I'm sorry for the Parson myself, Jap, but it may not be a lie, nor — well, you remember what happened at the barn-warming, Jap, and you remember where the dogs started when they first caught the trail. Perhaps Jim Gordon was able to — er — recognize the man who stabbed him."

Munson paused in front of the editor and stared blankly at him. Then he reached for the chair in a groping manner and sat down.

"Miller, I *had* forgotten. You may be right. But, dern it all, I don't blame him if he did do it. Even a preacher has his limits when it comes to putting up with insults." He tilted his chair back against the wall and gazed gloomily at the spluttering fire.

"No, we may not blame him, but the law will. We must face the thing, Jap, and fight according to law."

"Yes, but the law's a tricky piece of literature," said Jap, "and it generally goes pretty hard with a fellow if he tries to do it square. Derndest country a man ever lived in. Ain't fit for a Comanche Indian."

Miller smiled. "Oh, the country will be all right as soon as you cool down a little. And as for the tricks of the law, there are others besides Jim Gordon's crowd that know a few."

After calming Munson, the editor put on his coat, and together the two men went to Ward's house and gave Wayne the assurance of their loyal support.

When the news was given to Lorraine by her father, she stood white and silent for a moment, then took a step, tottered, and would have fallen had not his arm caught and supported her. Then she went to her room. The next morning she was not at her desk in the schoolroom, and a notice tacked on the door by Joe said that she was ill. Half a week sped by, and Wayne's imprisonment had been such scarcely more than in name, as he had lived at Ward's home and was treated as a member of the family, except that he remained within the yard. Not an hour of the day passed without one or more callers who declared their friendship for him. But the verdict was far from unanimous. Many there were who nodded their heads and looked wise, insisting that the preacher's arrest was not unexpected. "A man who hobnobs with gypsies has a bad streak some place." This

was the general expression by those who had never forgiven the preacher for the part he took in the row between Gordon and the gypsy.

Then one day the marshal came home in the middle of the morning, and Wayne saw at a glance that something had gone wrong.

"What's the trouble, Ward?" he asked, as the marshal kicked at the wood-box.

"Reckon there's trouble enough," was the response. Then he pulled an official-looking envelope from his pocket. "Here's a letter from the court ordering me to confine you in the town calaboose instead of permitting you to stay at my house. Some fellow has kicked up trouble, I suppose. Parson, you must have some bitter enemies around here."

Wayne nodded. "Yes, it seems so," he said. "But I am ready to go to the calaboose, Ward."

The marshal rolled the envelope tightly. "Of course I've got to obey," he said. "I'll get a stove up and a load of wood hauled there, and have it comfortable for you this afternoon. It'll be lonesome, as you will be there all alone."

The preacher laughed. "That's all right. I'll not be afraid, for, if I can't break out, burglars can't break in. Besides, I'll have my books, I suppose, and with books and my pipe I'll get along all right."

The Craigville town prison, or "calaboose," as it was generally called, stood at the edge of the town somewhat removed from surrounding build-

ings. It was a frame structure of two rooms, the larger one being the prison proper, and the smaller one being a sort of an office-room. A heavy oak door, protected on the prison side with sheet iron, connected the two rooms, while an opening about two feet square, heavily barred, permitted conversation between them. A thick shutter of heavy sheet iron covered this, being swung on hinges to permit of it being raised during interviews with the prisoners. It had been found necessary to place a stove in the prison portion, as the room could not be warmed from the office. A barred window on the east and one on the west admitted light. Into this place Ward moved a good cot, a centre-table, some chairs, and a clock, and by sundown Wayne was established in the prison.

The marshal, Jake Hausman, and the editor sat late with him that night, talking plans for his defense. He was to have a preliminary hearing on the morrow, and had declined to consult an attorney until after that event. Finally, the party was compelled to bid him good night.

"I'll not bar the door," said Ward, but Wayne insisted that it be done.

"I'll not leave if you do allow the bars to remain down," he said, "and they might as well be up. It's your duty. And put the shutter up to that place, too." He pointed to the opening between the two rooms, and after many expostulations Ward withdrew.

Left alone, Wayne lighted his pipe and opened

a book, but the lines remained unread. His thoughts were in the Wilson farmhouse, and memory brought to him the soft words of a fair singer. At last he aroused and saw that the coal no longer glowed in the bowl of his pipe. He laid it aside and went to bed. The night was biting cold and the wind moaned about the building, but, as he lay, a splash of moonlight came through the window, and, as he gazed at it sprawled on the floor by his cot, an ache shot to his heart as he noted the dark streaks — the shadow of the bars.

Breakfast was brought, smoking hot, by the marshal, and while the two men sat talking, the latch was raised and in plunged Dickson, the lawyer. With outstretched hand he strode through the office into the prison room and grasped the hand of the preacher.

"How on earth did you get here at such an hour?" queried Wayne, before the other could speak.

"Drove through from Riverside," replied Dickson.

"Whew!" exclaimed Ward. "And the mercury below zero!"

"I told Wayne the day would never be too cold nor the road too long for me to do him a service, and I'm here to keep my word, if possible. Have you a lawyer?" he asked, turning to Wayne.

"No, I concluded to conduct my own defense at the preliminary, and then be guided by what developed."

Dickson threw off his overcoat and sat down by the fire. "I just got back to Riverside last night from Chicago, and heard then of your trouble. I was on my way here at daylight, and I'm going to take charge of your case, by your leave."

Ward slapped his thigh enthusiastically. "By George, Dickson, but I'm glad to hear you say it! I'm going out now, and I'll leave you with the Parson." He hesitated a moment. "I suppose I'll have to fasten you in," he added. He went out, and to those of Wayne's friends he met he gave the information that the best lawyer in the county was managing his case.

An hour later, when the marshal returned, Dickson told him he was not ready to leave, and for him to return again in an hour. And when he finally did take his leave, he shook hands warmly with Wayne and went out whistling a merry tune. The lawyer went to the justice of the peace before whom the preliminary was to be held, and announced that his client waived this. Major Wilson, who had driven into town, protested, but Dickson's counsel prevailed.

"It's a mere formality in this instance," he said. "John Ormand is back of this, and he owns that justice. No defense could do any good, so we'll waive preliminary and avoid disclosing our plan of defense for the big trial."

The old man announced his willingness to give any bond required, but the dispenser of justice refused to accept any bond "until the extent of Gor-

don's injuries could be ascertained," as he said, and produced a written statement from the strange physician that the result of Gordon's wounds was still in doubt.

This phase of the case was entirely unexpected by Dickson, but he did no more than enter a formal protest, which he knew would be unavailing. The Major was filled with wrath, but a warning look from the lawyer caused him to hold his tongue. "No better evidences of a conspiracy could be given me," said Dickson, as they went back to the little prison.

The Wilson place was plunged in gloom. The old mother took down her Bible a little oftener, perhaps, and a little more frequently her devout song was heard. In her gentle way she had declared her faith in the preacher's innocence, and daily she prayed that God might reveal the truth. Lorraine did not discuss the case, but went about her affairs silently, a shadow in her eyes. And, after the first outburst on the part of the Major, he had little to say except that the accused man should not suffer for lack of money. And to Dickson he gave orders that no clue was to be left uninvestigated because of expense. Then he remained close at home and sat by the fire, his proud head bowed in his hands, for the lawyer told him that Wayne was hedged about by circumstantial evidence that of itself would cause great difficulty in securing an acquittal, and these circumstances, together with Gordon's sworn statement that, during

the brief struggle that night in the woods, he had clearly recognized Robert Wayne before the blow was struck, constituted a strong case.

On Sunday there was no preaching in the little church at Walnut Grove, but in the afternoon Joe, who had driven into town soon after breakfast, returned with Bess Craig in the sleigh beside him, and close behind came Paragraph and Susanna. Then life seemed to return to the house once more, for the editor, noting the dejection that had settled upon the household, exerted himself to restore laughter there.

To the old man's inquiry as to the financial health of the *Star*, he declared that its pulse was strong. "No community can be happy without a newspaper," he said. "Centuries ago, when the civilization of the Egyptians was in its cradle, whenever a man felt mighty impulses surging within him, he rushed out into the desert and carved his thoughts on a pyramid, or else he crawled into uncanny tombs and scratched his eternal message there. With the sunrise of the twentieth century in his face, a man, when he feels the gnawing of this chronicling desire, reaches for a telephone and tells his troubles to a newspaper reporter, and then reads all about himself in the next issue, with perhaps a few illustrations to interest the little ones. The modern newspaper is an institution that men cannot do without."

"Then you think the modern newspaper beats a pyramid, do you?" asked Lorraine, smiling.

The editor held up one finger. "I would speak

with reverence of the pyramids, the obelisks, and the tombs of Pharaoh's land. Their messages were and are for the ages, and out of the darkness of antiquity they have spoken to us, have whispered the secrets of brooding centuries, but the message of the modern newspaper is for to-day, for the eternal present."

"And the response to this message is a charge of yellow journalism," said Joe.

"You are not entirely wrong. We do hear much about 'yellowism.' I knew of a preacher once who became out of humor with the modern newspaper, and finally decided that Christ would not do things in the 'sensational' manner of the newspapers, so he announced that for one week he would run a newspaper as Christ would run it. The result was an insipid, colorless affair that represented nothing but crankism. I read of another preacher who longed to conduct an ideal newspaper, which, he said, would 'avoid sensationalism, educate the readers, represent the conscience of the American people, and fearlessly express it.' The trouble with that chap is that he is too slow; the modern newspaper has already occupied the field he is attempting to stake off."

"William, I expect they are tired of hearing your views on newspapers," interposed Susanna.

"And, no doubt, you think they are impatient to hear your views on millinery and whether this piece of goods should be cut on the bias and trimmed with appliqué or some other flubdubbery."

There was a general laugh at this retort, and then Paragraph arose and bowed humbly before his wife.

"Starbeam, I meant no rudeness," he said. "The newspaper is the best friend of the ladies, for it tells of the fashions as well as of other affairs."

"Then *vive la newspaper*," said Lorraine, gravely.

"A noble sentiment tersely put," said the editor. "The modern newspaper is the friend of mankind. It is aggressive in the cause of right, and carries on a ceaseless battle for the best and truest in life; it points mankind from the tomb of superstition to the cradle of true reverence; it lashes the evil-doer and applauds the faithful one. And as for sensationalism, what is it? A will-o'-the-wisp that appears frequently on men's tongues, but which defies location in their brains. Christ's crucifixion was sensational. A minister may declare a theory in the strongest and most vivid language at his command, and his flock will laud him as 'a man of fervid eloquence;' a newspaper may clothe a fact in terse, crisp descriptive sentences, but if the editor head-lines it in keeping with the busy age, his paper is 'yellow.' In the old days, when Time rode on ox-carts, the newspaper reader had time to sit by the fireside with his pipe and his mug, and carefully and methodically search the newspaper for the most important happenings. It is not so with the reader of the modern newspaper. Time travels on the

wings of the lightning, and the stock-ticker pleads for the reader's attention; the swirl of business is tugging at the fibres of his soul, and, as he swallows his coffee and rolls, he must see at a glance the important happenings of the world, and then he must dash for the office. The modern newspaper has not made the stock-ticker nor the multitudes of other incidents of modern business life, but it has lived up to them."

"And what of the modern editor?" asked Bess Craig.

Paragraph sighed. "Ah, sad is his lot," he said. "He is caricatured by budding artists, driven to desperation by long-haired poets, maligned by grinning humorists — and sued by the man with a fancied grievance. Trouble plows furrows across his forehead, and the frailties and hypocrisies of the world march in never-ending procession past his desk, and as he winnows them he pens editorials filled with learning, the learning that is born of listening intently to the heart-beats of the world, as well as that learning which comes of turning one by one the leaves of many books."

The evening came crisp but clear, the early winter twilight quickly giving place to the radiance of the full moon. After supper the party assembled in the parlor, where the hours were sped merrily with songs, riddle, and jest, as is the custom with the country folk of old Indiana. Wayne's trouble was frequently referred to, but Paragraph lightened their hearts by declaring with emphasis that it

would all come out right, as Dickson was a marvel of shrewdness. "Dave's a natural born detective, as well as a lawyer," he said. "And he never lets up until it's all over."

The old clock in mellow tones told the hour of ten, and Mrs. Wilson said it was time for her to retire. She left the room, and a moment later they heard the words of her favorite hymn softly sung. As the song ended, the Major arose and also bade the young people good night. Then Paragraph and Joe went to the barn, and in a short time drove up with the sleighs. Bess and Susanna from the depths of their furs shouted good-nights to Lorraine, and ran down to the gate. The robes were tucked about them, and in a moment they were off for Craigville, the bells jingling musically, and the runners flying over the hard-packed snow.

As the sound of the sleigh-bells died away, Lorraine turned back into the house and went to her room. She stood for a moment gazing out of the window at the world of white, the bright moonlight causing every object to stand forth distinctly. Then she went to her trunk and sank to her knees before it. Unlocking it, she drew forth the photograph that Wayne had found hidden in a book some weeks before. For an instant she gazed at the fair features there pictured, and then, pressing it to her lips, she rested her head on her arms and burst into tears.

But the beauty of the night touched her soul, and again she stood at the window, the moonlight,

“the smile of God,” she called it, streaming into her room. Wee voices called to her from the glory of the white-gowned fields. A thousand burning thoughts were surging through her brain; the joy and the sorrow of the past were rioting, curiously intermingled, and on her heart an ache lay heavy. And still the smile of God on the snow was wooing her, and gradually she harked to the tuneful piping of a sentiment. Down yonder, a short distance across the fields and close by the woods, the old foot-log was spanning Willow Creek, and there, in the evenings of summer, she had been accustomed to take her sorrows. With old Willow Creek slipping along beneath her feet, rest had always come to her heart. Why not now? She would have dismissed the thought, but the smile of God was on the snow, and the wee voice seemed whispering the question to her again and again: “Why not now?” “Why not now?”

She looked at her watch. It was 10.30. Her parents, she knew, were asleep, and she was certain that Joe would not return for an hour or more. A breath of fresh air, a brisk walk across the fields, a few moments on the old foot-log! It was enticing, and so easy! With a sudden resolve, she snatched her heavy wraps, bundled her furs about her shoulders and head, and turned towards the door. But as her hand rested on the knob, she hesitated a moment, and then, turning back, opened a case on her bureau and dropped a small silver-mounted revolver into her pocket, smiling as she

did so. Then she noiselessly opened the outer door and stepped forth into the night and the smile of God. The crisp air filled her lungs and sent the blood bounding through her veins as she walked briskly along. A rabbit sprang out of a fence corner and scudded away with great leaps. She passed along the edge of the woods, and a sudden gust of wind sighed through the bare branches, sifting snow in her face. The shadows of the trees lay in dark splotches on the snow, like the finger-prints of Sin on a life of purity. The bark of a farm dog came faintly to her ears, and among the shadows of the woods the dropping of dead twigs and the rustle of a stray leaf made strange noises. But the foot-log lay before her.

"Old friend, you should feel honored by my visit at such a time," she said, and laughed at her conceit. The snow covered the hand-rail, but she brushed it away and patted the time-worn timber as she spoke.

The willows were bending low beneath their snow burden, and, with the exception of a small current in the centre, the waters of the creek were stilled in the embrace of winter, the narrow channel showing dark in contrast with the glistening white of the snowy ice that bordered it. The air, though crisp, was tempered by that peculiar quality that precedes a thaw. She leaned on the rail and watched the water swirling in its jagged, narrow channel.

"A vein of liquid truth, a sentiment that knows

no winter, or, knowing adversity's chill, refuses to be stayed in its flow." She smiled, and then added: "That may be nonsense, Mr. Creek, but in my heart it is understood. The ice and the snow are all about my heart, Mr. Creek, but there is a current there that defies the chill."

She moved along the log, and then stopped with a slight exclamation. Plainly visible in the snow were a man's footprints, leading towards the opposite bank. She stooped to examine them, and then noted that two men had passed that way. It was evident that the tracks had been made recently.

"Sherlock Holmes probably could tell the color of their hair, and whether they were bank presidents or chicken thieves — but I can't."

She was in a gayer mood, but her levity was of short duration, for a sharp whistle sounded in the woods ahead of her, and was answered immediately by a whistle just over the bluff on the farther side of the creek. Hastily turning, she sped back across the foot-log, and, as she reached the bank, she darted into the shadows, for voices were heard. As she looked back, she saw two men come down the bluff to the log. She turned to run, but a dry stick broke beneath her weight with a loud report. She saw the men stop and look intently in her direction. Flight undetected was impossible. The dry branches lay thick beneath the snow, and the noise of their breaking as she ran would certainly betray her. She saw them start across the log, and carefully she picked her way to a giant oak close at

hand, and then, standing in its shadow, she pressed her body against its trunk. She peered out. Would they notice her tracks? The moon had dipped considerably lower and much of the foot-log was now in shadow, a fact she noted with gladness. The men were now across the creek, but had stopped a moment on the end of the foot-log. They were garbed in long, heavy overcoats and slouch hats, and — was that dark surface beneath their hats but shadow, or was it a mask? They came on, and she shrank back. Then there was an oath and they stopped again.

“Here, tie this damned mask on. It’s coming off.”

“Well, what’s the use of wearin’ ’em yet?” was the response.

“Moonlight isn’t good for the complexion.” The reply was in a drawling tone. “I don’t care to take any chances of being recognized.”

The girl shook as with a chill, and then her hands were suddenly clasped to her head as though a blow had been struck her. The gruff words of one of the men had almost wrung a cry from her lips.

“Think we’ll have any trouble gettin’ that preacher?”

“None at all,” was the drawling response. “The boys can — tie that a little tighter — batter down the door of that flimsy calaboose easy, and then drag the sneak out in a hurry. There’ll be no trouble, and when daylight comes the Rev. Wayne will be — ”

“Supposing Bill Ward shows up?”

"But he won't, I tell you. He's — can't you make that thing hold? — in Riverside. I had a game worked to get him there."

"And Gordon —"

"Is waiting to hear the news of the attack on the jail by sympathizing fellow citizens. Here, take my knife and punch another hole in that cussed rag. With Wayne's goose cooked, Jim will recover rapidly. He wasn't hurt as bad as they thought. That knife took a lucky course. Jim's up and around the room — but the dear people don't know it. The first time I saw him after he was hurt, I showed him how this game could be worked, and he grabbed at it. It's been a tonic to him."

"There, now, I'll bet a hog that crinoline won't come off."

"Well, let's be getting out of here, then. We ought to have the gang at the jail by the time the moon goes down. Damn that Wayne, I'll be glad —" The words were lost as the men moved away.

Lorraine was trembling, and leaned against a tree for support, an agony of fear raging in her bosom. The plot was clear to her, clear as the moonlight and cold as the ice. Wayne was to be mobbed, and Jim Gordon was a party to the plot. And she was helpless to prevent the devilish scheme from being executed. Then a thought flashed to her. Jim Gordon! He was the cause of it all, and perhaps he could end it all. They had said that he was able to be up and around, and that he was wait-

ing at that moment. Peering cautiously out to see that the men had gone, she ran to the foot-log, crossed the creek, and plunged into the woods. By going through the timber it was but a short distance to Gordon's house, and, heedless of the treacherous branches beneath the snow that tripped her, often causing her to fall prostrate, she hurried on. Once she stumbled, and, staggering forward, struck her forehead against a tree. The shock stunned her for a moment, but she steadied herself by grasping the tree. Then she went on. Something warm trickled down into her eyes and blinded her, and, when she looked at the handkerchief she had pressed to her eyes, she saw that it was stained with blood. Up one more hill she toiled, and then the Gordon place lay before her.

As she approached the house, she was gratified to see a light in an upper window and also one in the kitchen. It was a bold move she had undertaken, but the thought of what was soon to take place in Craigville sent her quickly to the door, and her knock was firm. She heard a chair dragged across the floor, a heavy tread, and then the door was opened by a man with a bald head and a hawk-like nose, who stood blinking at her. It was Johnson, the electric-line attorney.

"Come in, whoever you are," he said. "I'm too old to stand with the door open in winter."

The girl entered the room, and, as she stepped into the light, Johnson blinked his watery eyes at her more energetically than ever.

"This is surprising," he said. "My eyes are bad, but I can see that you are young. A man may be unable to distinguish an elephant from a sea-gull, but he can locate youth with one eye. He may —"

"Could I speak to Mrs. Gordon?"

"Sorry, but the old folks are in Indianapolis."

She clasped her hands. "Then I must see Mr. Jim Gordon at once."

"Well, this is surprising. Young lady comes —"

"Never mind!" she exclaimed. "I must see Mr. Gordon."

"Don't believe he's able to —"

She stamped her foot in a sudden fury of impatience. "I know you are lying! Go to Jim Gordon at once and tell him that — that — Lorraine Wilson wishes to speak to him. Hurry, I tell you!"

Johnson hesitated a moment, blinking at a rapid rate, and then turned away, muttering that it was "surprising, very surprising." In a few moments he came back. "He says he'll see you, Miss. Up that stairway."

She brushed past the half-blind attorney and hurried up the stairway. A light shone over the transom of a near-by room and she knocked at the door, but the sense of her compromising position weighed heavily on her now, and the rap was hesitating.

"Come in!"

There was no time for consideration of conventionalities, and she opened the door and entered the room. Jim Gordon sat, fully dressed, in an

armchair before the fire. His face lacked color, but that he had regained considerable strength was shown by the steadiness with which he arose to his feet and bowed to her.

"Sit down," he said, indicating a chair. "This call is very unexpected, and I am sorry to see that there is blood on your face."

"It is nothing!" she exclaimed, touching her bruised brow. Then she faced him, with a sudden terror reflecting in her eyes. "Jim Gordon, water will remove this blood from my face, but if you permit your hands to be stained with blood, eternity will not remove it! The fires of hell will burn it into your soul!"

A deeper pallor blanched his face, and he grasped the back of the chair unsteadily. "I — don't understand your —"

"I haven't time for evasions," she interrupted. "You know that at this minute masked men are on their way to Craigville to mob Mr. Wayne." He attempted to speak, but she stopped him. "You can prevent this if you will. Even if he is guilty, he is entitled to justice. They will murder him in your name!"

"I will not admit that I know anything of what you are speaking, but I am sure that even if that man is visited by regulators, they will do nothing more than give him a few lashes and perhaps a uniform of tar and feathers."

"Regulators? Murderers, Jim Gordon, and in your name!" Then her self-control suddenly broke,

and she dropped to her knees, her arms outstretched appealingly. "Save him, oh, for God's sake, save him!" she sobbed.

Gordon drew back, and, taking his hand from the chair, stood looking at her coldly. "So, you plead for him, do you?" A sneer was in his tone. "Major Wilson's daughter tramps through the snow in the night and suffers the blood to flow from her wounds that she may beg for her lover! And such a lover! A nobody from nowhere! An escaped convict —"

"It's a lie!" she moaned.

"An assassin who creeps through the woods in the night to —"

"Stop!" she pleaded.

"Sink his knife in the back of a man who loved his sweetheart!" Then his eyes blazed with a sudden passion, and he stepped forward and stood over her, his hands working convulsively. "But listen to me! Before daylight that hound will pay the price. I'll admit that I know of what is to take place, but you dare not tell that I know. Do you understand? Breathe to a soul that you were in this house to-night and your name will pay the forfeit! You are here alone with two men! You understand? I have loved you, — yes, and still love you, — but if you will not be mine, he shall not claim you. I love you, but if I writhe in hell, I will still smile when I remember that you are not in his arms."

The girl cowered on the floor before him, her

hands to her face, but as he paused she looked up at him through her tears.

"Mercy, Jim! Is there no mercy in your heart?"

He had turned away, but wheeled suddenly, and his hand clutched at his heart. "Mercy? What mercy have you shown me while my heart, my soul, shrieked in agony? For years I have dreamed of you as my wife, but my love has seared my soul and left a scar for my heart. And you —"

She arose quickly to her feet, and he paused. For a moment she stood thus, facing him, the tears no longer flowing. Then she spoke, and her tones were hard and even, but so low as to be scarcely audible.

"Listen, Jim. You say you love me and have dreamed of me as your wife. Unless you save him, the mob will murder Robert Wayne. If you love me, stop this work of assassination, and then" — she caught the back of the chair — "and then come to me — and — claim me as — your wife."

A quick gasp, and Gordon was at her side, but his hands did not touch her. "You mean it? You will be my wife?"

"Yes." The reply was almost a whisper.

"And you love me, Lorraine, — you love me?" His voice was eager and his gaze was hot.

"I will be your wife," she answered, and she still clung to the chair.

A bitter laugh broke from his lips, and fury again shone in his eyes. "No!" he exclaimed. "No!"

I may be a fool, I may be a devil at times, but I want no wife who loves another. But this night will remove that other." He laughed again. "The fiends in hell will sing my welcome, but I'll be happy! I'll be happy!"

Without a word she turned toward the door, but he sprang forward and barred her way.

"And now?" he asked.

"I shall arouse the neighborhood. There may yet be time."

He shook his head. "No," he said. "You'll do nothing of the sort. You'll not leave this room for an hour, and then you'll not say a word about being here. You know why."

"You would use force?" she asked, retreating a step.

"Yes. You shall not leave."

Her brain whirled, but as her arms dropped helplessly at her sides, her hand touched something in her pocket, and in an instant hope and resolution flamed in her eyes. With a quick movement, she drew the revolver and leveled it at the man before her. No more weakness, no more indecision, no more faltering! Her hand was steady, and the eye that glanced along the bright barrel was clear and cold as the stars in the wintry sky. Gordon stared into the muzzle of the weapon in surprise.

"What — do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that I shall leave here!" was the reply.

"You would not kill me?"

"Before God, I swear that if you do not stand

aside, I will shoot you down!" Her words came with a rush and were tense with resolution.

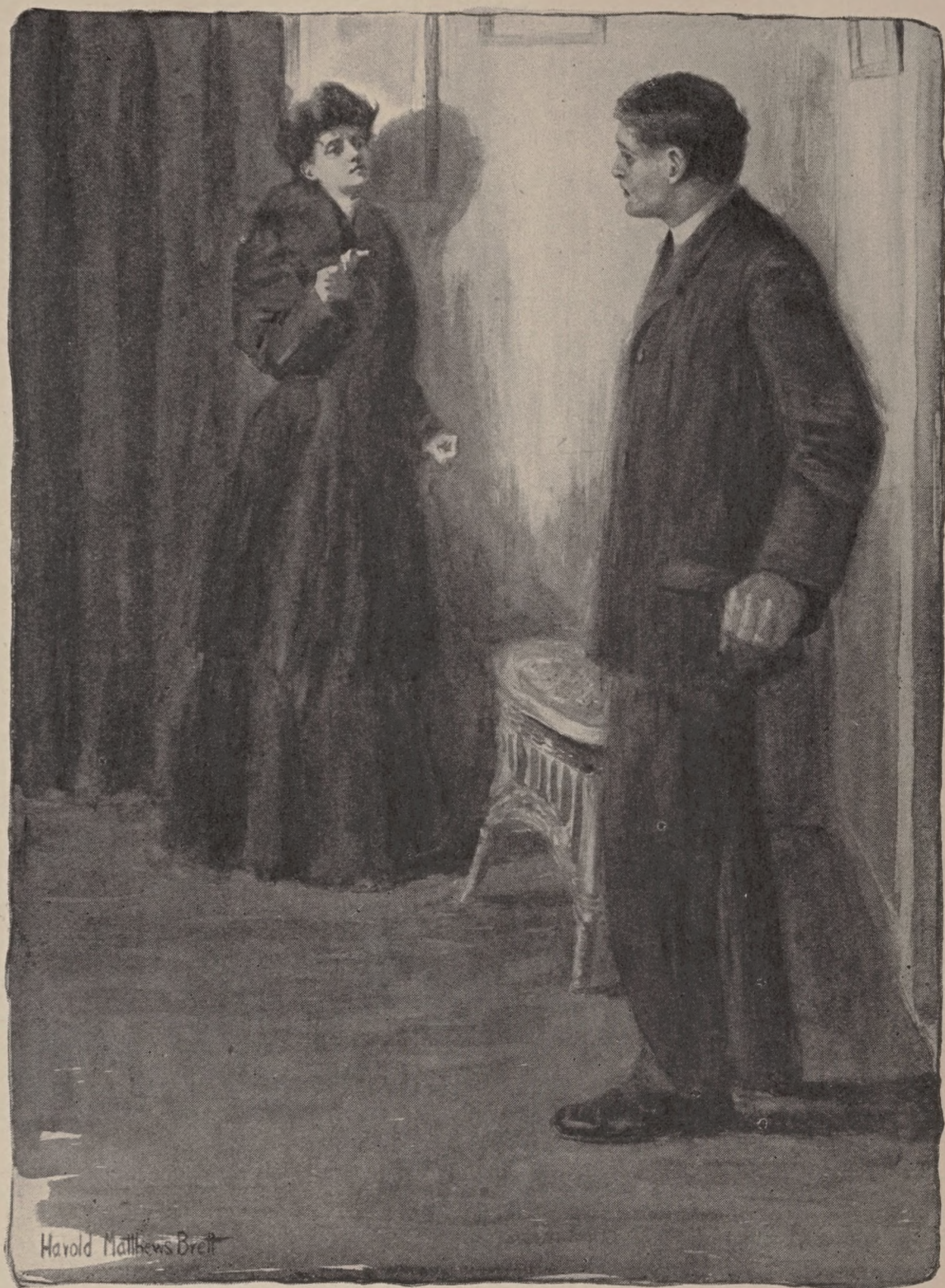
"Quick!" she demanded, as he wavered.

He noted the lines tightening about her mouth, and, as he still hesitated, he saw the small, white finger curving closer about the trigger. Great drops of sweat started out on his forehead. Then a pistol-shot rang out, but he had leaped aside as he saw the trigger moving, and the ball crashed through the door.

"Great God!" he gasped, but the girl jerked the door open and ran down the stairs, the smoking pistol still clutched in her hand. At the foot of the stairs she met Johnson, but easily dodged past him, and in a moment was in the yard.

Munson's house was a mile down the road, and she decided that he was the man to arouse first. She hurried down the road, and then, noting that the moon was fast dropping, she began running. The road was beaten hard and smooth and her hopes rose. Now the house was close at hand; she could see it plainly; but as she ran her foot slipped on a bit of ice and she fell heavily in the road. As she attempted to rise, an agony of pain shot through her right ankle and she sank down with a cry. The house was so near, she must reach it! Once more she made the attempt, only to sink down fainting from the pain of a badly sprained ankle.

Jap Munson, trustee, had sat up late figuring on the number of people in his township who were in need of aid. When he had gone to bed, his dreams



AS HE STILL HESITATED, HE SAW THE SMALL, WHITE FINGER
CURVING CLOSER ABOUT THE TRIGGER. — *Page 376.*

were disturbed by a mighty array of paupers who marched in spectral procession past his pillow. With their cries and sobs in his ears, he awoke, and then rubbed his eyes vigorously, for it seemed not a dream, after all. Surely that was a cry and not a dream! He shook his wife.

"Seems to me I hear some one calling," he said.

"Must be Elihu's neuralgia, or Johnny's rheumatiz. Better go for a doctor, Jasper."

"Huh! It wasn't that. Jemimy, there it is, sure enough!"

Some one was beating on the door, and they heard a faint voice calling them. Munson bounced out of bed and jerked on his trousers.

"Do be careful, Jasper. Maybe it's a trick to get you to the door and rob you. The *Star* told of a case just that way last week." But the wiry little man had hurried to the door. As he opened it, he gasped with surprise, for a woman lay on the doorstep, and as she raised her head he saw that it was Lorraine Wilson.

Calling to his wife, Munson picked the girl up and carried her into the house and laid her on a lounge, but even as he did this she was telling her story of the mob that was going to Craigville, and how she had crawled through the snow to the house after she had revived from her fainting spell in the road.

Munson pulled on his boots with feverish haste, and then turn things topsy-turvy in his search for his coat.

"What are you going to do, Jasper?" asked his wife, busying herself in the application of liniments and bandages to the swollen ankle.

"Goin' to Craigville, of course, fast as a horse can take me, soon as I rout out some fellows along the way."

"But do be careful. You haven't a gun of any kind, you know," she insisted.

Munson snorted in disgust. "Who in thunder wants a gun? Ain't I got my blacksnake?" He pulled his cap down over his ears, snatched the whip from the hook reserved especially for it (considering it too valuable to be left in the barn), and then turned to the girl, who lay quietly weeping.

"Keep up your nerve, Lorry," he said. "They sha'n't touch the Parson. Old Blacky (shaking his whip) will bite 'em." Then he bolted for the stable.

His wife jumped up and ran to the door. "Good for you, Jasper!" she called. "And don't forget I'm proud of you!"

A few minutes later they heard the beat of hoofs on the road, and as the wife stepped to the door she saw her husband, bending low on the bare back of a horse, flash by.

When Joe and Paragraph drove into Craigville, the editor shouted a good-night and turned off to his own home, while Joe drove on to the Craig home. He was not cold, but of course did not decline Bess's invitation to go in and get warm. The parlor was cozy, the fire was cheerful, and Bess was adorable, so it was not surprising that

the clock was threatening to strike the hour of one when Joe again stepped into the sleigh. He hummed a merry tune, because Bess had whispered a date to him when she would become his wife. But, as he was turning towards home, the thought of Wayne flashed into his mind.

"Poor chap," he muttered, and then turned sharply to the right and drove in the direction of the calaboose. "Guess I'll drive past and be sociable, even if he is asleep."

The little calaboose stood a short distance back from the road, but there was no fence around it, so the young farmer turned his horse off from the road and drove towards it in order to pay tribute to a sentiment. The prison was dark, and he would have driven on but at that moment he saw two men dodge back of the building.

"Whoa!" He pulled up sharp, and studied a moment. What were the men doing there? What should he do?

"Hello, back there!" he called, but there was no response. He twitched the lines and drove to the corner of the building, but no one was there. Another moment of indecision. Should he — There was a sound behind him, and as he looked around two men were at the sides of the sleigh, and in the hand of one something glittered in the moonlight. Joe stung the horse with the whip, but one of the men caught the bridle, stopping the animal's plunge forward. Dropping the lines, the stalwart young farmer rose to his feet to give battle, but the other

man had clambered over the back of the sleigh, and the muzzle of a revolver was thrust into his face.

"Be quiet or you'll get hurt!" was the sharp command. Joe was not a coward, but he saw the uselessness of resistance, and he obeyed the order. He saw that his captors were masked.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked, quietly.

"Good for you, young fellow. You talk like a man and not like a whimpering kid. It means that we insist on your society for awhile, but that you won't be hurt if you behave." There was admiration in his tone.

"All right; I've decided to visit you." Joe smiled in spite of the seriousness of the affair.

Without further words he was bound and a cloth was thrust, not unkindly, into his mouth as a gag. Then the sleigh was driven to a near-by stable, and the young farmer was carried in and laid on the hay. The men hunted around and found a number of horse blankets, which they wrapped about him.

"Don't want you to get cold," one of them said, and tucked him down into the hay and blankets as carefully as he would a child. Then the men took their positions in front of the stable, stamping up and down to keep warm, and occasionally circling about the calaboose.

"If any fellow turns traitor, he'll not succeed in stealing our man out of here, that's sure," said one.

Half an hour passed; the moon was hanging on the western horizon. A man rode up to the stable, and soon another came, and then another and another, until ten were assembled, each wearing a mask. There were but few words. Their horses were tied in the shadows, and, after a whispered consultation, six of the men hurried away in the direction of the railroad, and soon returned bearing a heavy cross-tie. Another moment of consultation, and then the leader led the way to the calaboose, and as he walked a limp was noticeable.

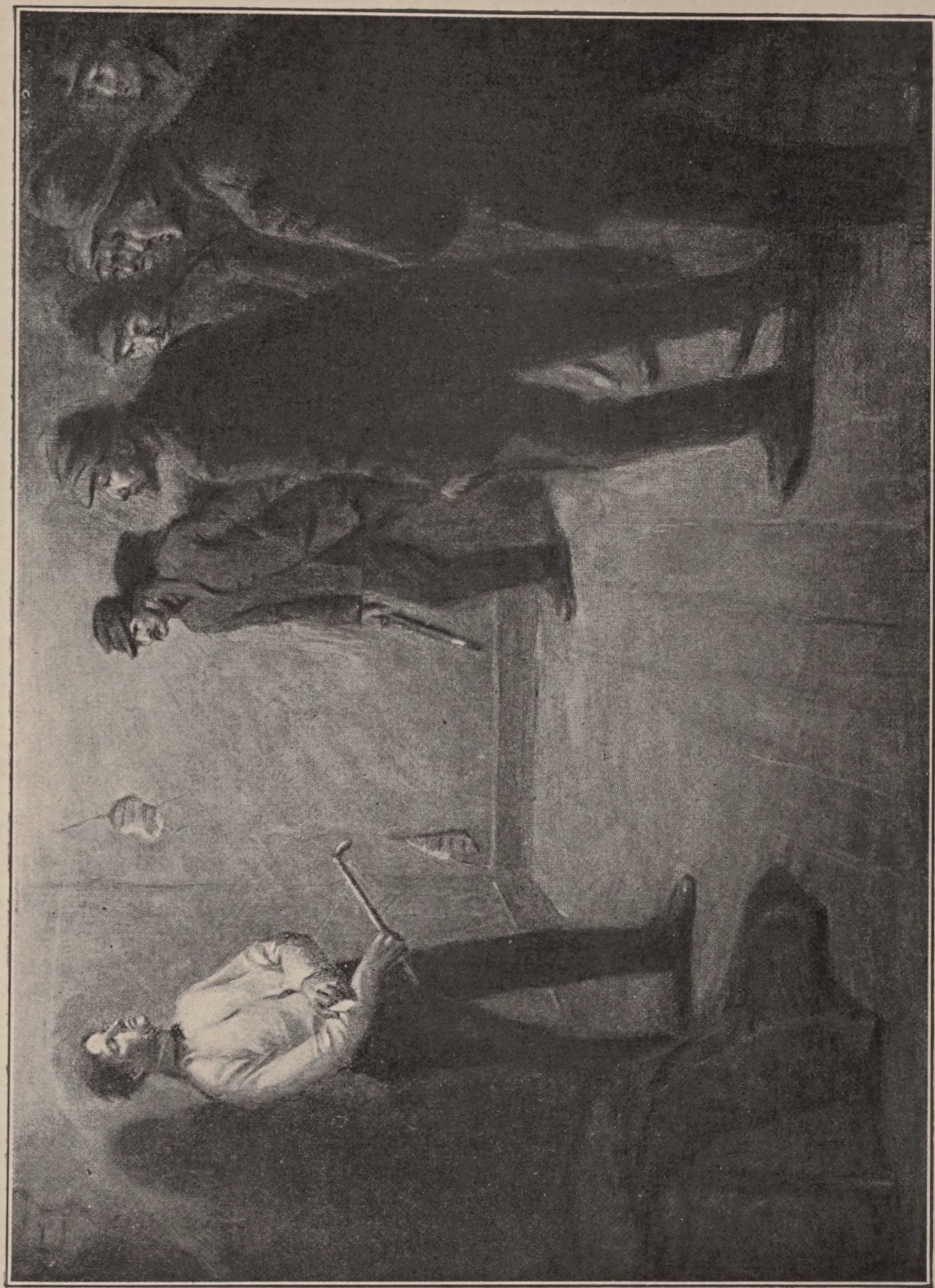
Wayne was awakened by a shock that caused every board of his frail prison to vibrate. He sprang from his cot and listened. Again came that awful shock, and he heard the outer door of the building splintering. Then the terrible truth dawned upon him, and the realization of his helplessness caused his cheeks to blanch. Voices were heard now, a command was given, and the next instant the door gave way with a crash, and he heard men rushing into the office-room. There were muttered exclamations, but no shouts or loud words were heard. It was evident that the mob was cool and calm in its devilish purpose. The preacher stood in the middle of the floor, his teeth hard set, his hands clenched, every nerve, every muscle at the highest tension. Once he thought of shouting for help, but the hopelessness of it was apparent, and he knew that such a sign of weakness on his part would afford his assailants the keenest delight. He had not dreamed that his enemies

would go to such lengths, but now that the deadly peril had come, he determined to meet it like a man, as a minister of God should meet it. There was a sound of fumbling at the connecting door.

"Bring in that tie," he heard some one command, and by the tramping of feet he knew that it was being done. In a few moments the slight barrier would be battered down, they would pour in on him, and then — He sprang to the stove and snatched up the heavy iron poker, and then the door received the shock of the battering-ram. Again and again came that heavy timber, and to the man in the darkness of the little prison cell the blows sounded as the strokes of a funeral knell. Once more the tie was hurled against the stubborn door, and then the timbers gave way, the door hanging, splintered and wrecked, by one hinge. The crucial moment had come, and the preacher was amazed at his own coolness as he clutched the poker and swung it about his head to measure his distance. The men were crowding forward, when the leader's voice sounded.

"Wait," he said. "Light the lamp, so you can see to drag the cur from his kennel. Take no chances in the dark."

The wisdom of this advice appealed to them, especially as the silence in the room had begun to annoy and perplex them. A match rasped across the wall and a tiny flame shot up. The lamp, swinging from the ceiling, was lighted, and a hoarse growl went up as the mob caught sight of its prey.



HE SIMPLY STOOD AT BAY — WAITING. — Page 383.

In a corner he stood, the iron bludgeon poised for a blow. The lamplight fell full on his features and showed the muscles of his jaw standing out in bold relief under the tension of the moment. His face was as of graven stone, though his eyes blazed hot. Not a word passed his lips. He simply stood at bay — waiting. Then the man-hunters surged forward, the tottering door was kicked aside, and a man with a heavy club sprang towards the preacher, the club, grasped with both hands far apart, held horizontally as a fender. Wayne saw the intention, and like a flash he swung the poker with all his strength. The man with the club dexterously received the blow on the heavy stick, but the crushing force broke the club, and the poker laid open the scalp of the man holding it and sent him to his knees. But he had accomplished his purpose. Before the preacher could raise his weapon for another blow, the others were upon him. There was a terrible struggle, but there could be but one ending, and in a brief time he was overpowered and a rope bound his arms to his side. The victory had not been without price, however, as blood was streaming from more than one face from which the mask had been torn. The preacher, also, was smeared with blood, his flesh being bruised and his clothing torn. And now he stood, panting from the struggle, his arms bound, but his head erect. And still no word from him.

“Damn you, you’ll pay for this,” said one, as

the masks were hastily adjusted again. "Drag him out of here!"

The men seized the rope and started towards the door, dragging the preacher as they would an animal, when suddenly one of the masked men, who had been standing apart, gazing steadily at the prisoner, sprang forward; a knife flashed in the lamplight and the rope parted.

"No! By God, no!" he shouted, planting himself between Wayne and the mob.

There was an instant of surprised silence. Then the leader pushed to the front.

"He's a traitor; seize him!" he cried.

The man with the knife tore the mask from his face. It was the gypsy. He crouched, with stiletto upraised, in the lamplight the picture of a devil.

"You no touch dees man! I kill de first one that come! You hear? Dees man no stab Gordon. I stab him! Dees knife do eet!" His words came like the venomous hiss of a rattlesnake, and as he shook the glittering blade before them the men shrank back a step. Wayne's arms were still bound, but with a quick movement the gypsy severed the rope.

"I say I no forget you, meester!" he said, but the sudden shift in the affairs had left the preacher unnerved, and he staggered back against the wall.

"It's a trick! The gypsy is lying!" The men had recovered themselves, and were edging around to renew the attack.

"No, it's the truth!"

The words came from the outer doorway, and as the mob turned to meet this new surprise they saw Jim Gordon standing on the threshold. His hat was missing, his hair was disheveled, and his face shone ghastly as he advanced with upraised arm.

"Some of you are honest in your belief that Robert Wayne attempted my murder, but I say to you that I have lied. That night in the woods I recognized the gypsy — and there he is!" He pointed towards the crouching figure with the knife.

"Yes, I stab you," said the nomad. "You beat me, and I swear revenge. Dees man" (pointing to Wayne) "save me, and I swear to remember. A man hire me to come here and kill who they drag out. I come, but I see who he is, and I remember he save me. I cut rope and —"

The thud of hoofs sounded close by, and the next moment Jap Munson sprang into the calaboose, closely followed by half a dozen farmers carrying shotguns. In Jap's hand was his beloved black-snake, coiled as though ready to spring.

"Don't one of you move!" he shouted. "Old Blacky will bite the first devil that bats his eye! You hear me? You hear *me*?"

Wayne laughed. "It's all right, Jap," he called. "We're just a sociable little party now. But how did you get here?"

The rescuing party and the masked men eyed each other warily for a time, but gradually the "regulators" began pulling off their masks and

confessing that they had been duped into a piece of villainy.

"Rode here, that's how," responded Munson, pushing forward and giving Gordon a sidelong glance. "Rode here because —" He checked himself. "I reckon I'll not tell you right here how I got the word." He turned his gaze full on Gordon, who had sunk into a chair, his face white and drawn.

"I know — I know!" whispered Gordon. "She's the noblest woman that —" His head suddenly dropped, and he would have fallen to the floor had not Wayne caught him.

"He's fainted," he said. "There's water in that bucket yonder. Bring it, quick!"

After a few minutes' energetic treatment, during which Wayne briefly recounted to Munson the events of the attack on the calaboose, Gordon recovered sufficiently to stagger to his feet.

"I must go home," he said. "Help me to my horse."

"Sit down," said Munson. "We'll haul you home. But where's that gypsy?"

He was gone. During the confusion he had slipped out of the place and had vanished, never more to be seen in that community. The leader of the mob, the man with the limp and the drawling speech, had also disappeared. Munson faced the men.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Jim Gordon says the Parson is not guilty. But he must remain a prisoner, of course, until the law discharges him. He

can't stay here any longer. I'm trustee of this township, and therefore, as the only officer present, I take charge of the prisoner and will keep him at my house. I guess we can all go home now, — and, if any of you have any masks in your pockets, you had better burn them."

One of the men told where Joe was lying, and in a few minutes the young farmer was again at liberty.

"Jaws are a little stiff from that gag, but I guess I'm all right," he said.

"Joe, you take Gordon home in your sleigh, and I'll get a sleigh and take my prisoner home with me," said Munson, with a laugh.

During the ride home Gordon was silent, and Joe asked him no questions. He helped Gordon to the house, the door being opened by Johnson, who swore he never knew of anything so surprising. Gordon extended his hand, and Joe clasped it. Then they parted without a word.

Munson routed out the liveryman, and soon was flying towards home with Wayne by his side. "I didn't catch all of Lorry's story," he was saying. "About all I know is that she came crawling to the house through the snow and said the mob was to murder you."

"And big-hearted Jap Munson rode to my rescue," added Wayne, laying his hand on Munson's arm, and brushing away the moisture that crept into his eyes. "Sometimes trouble is worth its anxiety because of the friends it proves to us."

"Well, old Blacky needed an airin'," responded Munson, a little break in his voice. He swallowed hard a couple of times, and then blurted out: "Looks like snow, Parson."

Wayne smiled, understanding the effort the other was making to restrain his emotion.

"Hard to tell," he answered, evasively. The sky was clear.

When they reached Munson's, they found that Joe had preceded them and had told the story of the rescue. Lorraine had listened eagerly until he declared that Jim Gordon had ridden to the calaboose just in time to end it all. Then she closed her eyes and a moan escaped her lips. Jim Gordon had, after all, accepted her bargain. Under its terms she was now his promised wife.

There was a commotion in another room, and she heard Mrs. Munson telling some one to wash the blood from his face. A voice she well knew replied that it was a mere scratch. They were coming. She nerved herself for the meeting. She closed her eyes again, and when she opened them Wayne stood beside the couch. She smiled and held out her hand. He clasped it in both of his. His lips parted, but no words came. Then at last he found his voice.

"I — I — can't find — words," he faltered.

She laughed. "Don't try, then. It really isn't worth while," she said, with seeming carelessness. She remembered that she was pledged to Jim Gordon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN CHRISTMAS CAME

DAVID DICKSON was unlocking his office in Riverside the next morning when a messenger boy handed him a telegram. It was signed by Joe Wilson, and gave a brief account of the assault on the calaboose and of Gordon's declaration of Wayne's innocence. With an exclamation of delight, Dickson bolted for the office of the county judge, leaving the key sticking in the door, and unheeding the messenger boy's request for him to stop and sign the book.

Fairly dancing into the judge's office, the lawyer laid the telegram before that official. There was a short consultation, and the next train for Craigville carried Dickson as a passenger. He found the village ablaze with excitement over the stirring drama that had been enacted within its peaceful confines, and those who had been recorded in the unfriendly list were now the loudest in their vows of friendship for the preacher.

Paragraph saw Dickson at the livery-stable. "The justice who refused to accept bond for the Parson got out of town early this morning. Didn't

wait for a train, but drove out," he said. "Don't suppose a blind man could fail to see the game that was worked to keep Bob where the mob could get at him."

The news had spread throughout the country, and people drove in from miles to see the battered calaboose. Indignation grew, and hotheads talked of seeking out the members of the mob and wreaking vengeance on them, but the Dunkards, the quiet, even-tempered men of God, went among the turbulent spirits and calmed the rising storm. Jake Hausman caught the spirit of peace, and, with much puffing and wheezing, he clambered up on a store box and made a short speech, aimed to be a plea for respect to law, but in reality a eulogy to "Parson Wayne," a speech that abounded in homely figures of speech, which, however, glowed with earnestness. The air was nipping, but Hausman was listened to with attention and was cheered as he closed.

"Jake's gettin' to be an 'Old Man Eloquent,'" said Timothy Craig. "Used to be he couldn't say the Lord's Prayer, because it was too long."

Before noon Dickson was in the presence of Jim Gordon, and had secured his signed statement that Wayne was guiltless of the charge against him. The next day an order came from the judge to the marshal to release Robert Wayne on his own recognizance until his formal discharge could be effected by due process of law.

Lorraine was taken home in a buggy by Joe, and,

as the young farmer carried the girl into the house, the preacher stood in the doorway, battling with an impulse to snatch the precious burden and clasp her close to his heart while he poured forth the story of his love, a love that refused to recognize any gulf. But he closed the door after them, and then sat silently in an adjoining room while Joe laid her on a couch and her mother cried over her.

The Major came into the room, the tears glistening in his eyes. The preacher arose and put his arm on the other's shoulder. "She is the noblest work of God," he said, simply.

The old man straightened his stooped shoulders for a moment, and the tears no longer flowed. "She's a credit to the Wabash," he said, proudly.

In his own room Wayne lighted his pipe and sat before the fire. The smoke curled lazily upward in fantastic wreaths, but he saw them not. His eyes were closed. He saw a Cross, and near it an angel with a sceptre of roses. Faintly from below he heard the mother's quavering voice raised in sacred song, and he knew her heart was filled with praise to God for His mercies. The Cross glowed brighter as he harked to the song. Then he thought of the tragedy of his life, of his mistakes, and of the false position he had occupied in that house. And as he mused a shadow fell on the Cross.

The next morning as the family sat at breakfast, they heard a stamping of heavily booted feet; the door swung open, and Jap Munson came in.

"I'll apologize for not knockin'," he said, brusquely, "but I know you don't care. I'm in such a rush that I didn't think I could spare the time to knock. Yes, sir, Major, I'm in a rush."

"Well, sit down and have some breakfast," said the old man, with a smile.

"Nope. Had breakfast, and, besides, I ain't got time. Where's the Parson?" He sat down, tilted his chair against the wall, and carefully coiled his blacksnake.

"Robert took a vacation and went away last evening," replied the old man. "He said he had some business affairs he wanted to look after, and that he probably would be gone a couple of weeks."

"Reckon we'll all be glad to see him back," said Munson, meditatively fingering the whip-lash. "He's mighty popular now — could be elected to any office easy as fallin' off a log."

"By the way, Jap, I saw Hiram Owens the other day, and he said you two had made up."

The little man looked uncomfortable, and fidgeted nervously for a moment. "Yep, I guess so," he said, at last.

"And how about the line fence dispute?"

"Oh, it's all settled. But I must mosey along."

"What did you do with your old rail fence, Jap?" persisted Joe.

"Well, I'll tell you how it was. There is a sick widow over near the river and I had given her all the township stuff the law allows. Then one day I comes past there and finds her a-shiverin' around

without any wood. I goes home a-thinkin' mighty hard. When I gets there I takes an axe and in a couple of hours I had knocked thunder — beg pardon, Lorry — out of that rail fence, and split up enough to keep her warm a bit. I'm haulin' her another load now." He uncoiled the blacksnake and flicked it at a chair leg. "An' that's the way the fence dispute ended," he added.

The Major squared around and looked at him a moment. "Jap," he said, "you've got enough gold in your heart to make you an ardent McKinley man."

Munson carefully gathered up his whip again. "Well, I tell you, Major, hard times are comin' down the road a-whoopin' — but they cut across the fields to reach the widow. Owens ain't a bad sort. He donated three barrels of potatoes to the poor, and I've got one barrel of 'em on the wagon out yonder along with my old rail fence."

"A curious flag of truce," laughed Joe.

"Guess it suits the widow," responded Munson.

"How is Mrs. Munson and the children?" inquired Mrs. Wilson.

"Sufferin' and happy," replied the trustee. "Wife's got something in her head, and she says she knows it'll be an abscess and that she'll have to have her head cut open. Elihu's got congestion of the stomach, and Johnny's got" (he scratched his head) — "got something, I disremember just what."

"Well, well, it's too bad," said Mrs. Wilson,

sympathizingly. "Perhaps I can send her a recipe for a home-made remedy that will help her."

"Much obliged, I'm sure, but I'm afraid it would get lost. We ain't got no good place to keep such things. I told wife the other day we needed a Bible. By the way, Lorry, I saw some of your school kids the other day and they're anxious to have you back. Said that girl that's substitutin' for you is cross as an X."

Lorraine laughed. "Oh, I'll soon be back. I can handle my crutches now like a professional beggar."

"Glad to hear it. But I expect that widow is needin' the wood and potatoes, so I'll rush along." He sprang to his feet, ducked his red head in a jerky bow, and slammed the door behind him. A moment later they heard the blacksnake pop and heard the finging of his wagon wheels on the snow.

That afternoon a note came to Lorraine from the Gordons, saying that Jim wished to see her. She guessed the reason. He wished to assert his claim on her. Accompanied by Joe, she drove to the place, and they were shown into the room where she had knelt at the feet of this man and offered herself as a sacrifice. Gordon's night ride had cost him dear, and he now lay tossing in the burning fever of a relapse.

"I'm glad you've come," he whispered. "My soul wants peace."

Lorraine sat silent, but her wandering gaze noted

the bullet-hole in the door, and her cheeks colored. Gordon caught the glance, and a wan smile hovered about his lips.

"I want that hole left," he said. "I think — Christ entered — there."

She looked at him in surprise, and Joe coughed to stifle his exclamation of wonder.

"You wanted to see me?" she asked, after an interval of silence.

"Yes — about Robert Wayne. Wait," he said, as she was about to speak. He pointed to the door. "I told you Christ came in at that bullet-hole, and I want to tell you that hate left by the same route. I am bad sick, but I do not think I am going to die, so it is not a death-bed repentance. I cannot remember when I did not love you, Lorraine — don't shrink. When I became a man I dreamed of you as my wife. And then Robert Wayne came and I saw that my dream was to be but a dream. Hate got into my heart and mortgaged me to the Devil. Then the gypsy attacked me that night in the woods, and the next day one of the Devil's assistants told me how easy it would be to fasten the crime on the preacher, and get him out of the way with a mob. I was insane from jealousy, I think, but after — that" (he pointed to the bullet-scarred door), "I fell almost fainting across the bed, the imps of hell battling for my soul. But somehow the words of a sermon I once heard Wayne preach came ringing in my ears and a strange peace entered my soul. I got up and

found that I was murmuring a prayer. I was not strong, but I got to my horse and rode to Craigville — in time."

He paused a moment, and she arose and stood by his side. "You are too weak," she said. "Tell me some other time."

"No, no!" he cried. "I must tell you now — now! As I rode I thought of your sacrifice for him. I thought of your bleeding face and how you had tramped through the snow; how you had fired in his defense after you had offered yourself to me as a sacrifice for him. I thought of this, and I thanked God that He had sent an angel into the world." There was another bit of silence, and he looked steadily at her. "I sent for you," he continued, "that I might remind you of your promise to be my wife in case I saved Robert Wayne. And —"

Her face paled, and she sank into the chair again. "Yes," she murmured, "I thought so."

"And I wish to say — that — I release you from it." There was a break in his voice, and a tear crept out of his eyes as he noted the eagerness with which she started to her feet, her crutches clasped in her trembling hands. "Never mind," he said, as she poured forth her gratitude. "You have shown me that there is a God in heaven and that even Jim Gordon may be a man."

And when they left him a new light was in his eyes and a cheerful smile brightened his face.

Christmas was close at hand. But one day intervened, and the streets of Riverside were pulsing with life. Merry shoppers were hurrying along; laugh and jest were everywhere; but as if to show the thoughtless, gay throngs that life, after all, is but a fleeting vanity, a funeral procession slowly traversed the streets. It was a modest affair, just the hearse, and then a solitary carriage containing the minister, a heavily veiled lady, and a little boy.

The services at the bleak grave were soon ended. A sheaf of ripened wheat was tenderly laid on the casket by the woman and moistened with her tears; then back through the gay streets the carriage wended its way, stopping before a small cottage in the outskirts. The minister entered the house with the lady and the boy, and, sitting before the fire in the tiny parlor, spoke comforting words.

"And he was not your father?" he asked, in surprise.

The woman shook her head. "No," she said, sadly, "not by blood, but by the kindness and protection he was."

The minister murmured a few words, but the woman did not hear. She was gazing into the fire, her head on her hand, her elbow on her knee.

"Blind and infirm as he was, he was all we had to cling to." She spoke in an abstracted manner, as though unconscious of the presence of an auditor. "We had everything in common. He was homeless — so was I. He provided a home for

me and my boy, and I kept house for him. Little Joe sang on the streets while he played." She went to a corner and picked up a violin. "All he had to love in this world was this — and little Joe," she said. The child crept into his mother's arms and cried silently. Even at his tender age, contact with the world had made of him a stoic.

"And now?" asked the minister.

She clasped her arms tighter about the boy. Then she slowly shook her head. "I don't know," she said, at last.

"Have you no relatives to whom you can go?"

She hesitated. "I have a father and a mother, but my father would not receive me. Once I erred — not sinned, mind you, sir — and he renounced me. To him I am dead."

The minister arose and stood before her. "The day after to-morrow is Christmas. Christ died on the Cross that the mistakes of men might be forgiven. Surely on that day your father will not refuse you."

A sudden light shone in her eyes, but only for a moment. She turned to the window in silence, and soon the minister murmured a good-by and tiptoed to the door as though fearing to disturb her. He went forth into the joy of the world, leaving her alone with her boy and her sorrow.

A blizzard came with the darkness, and all night long there raged one of the worst storms in the State's history, and when daylight struggled through the clouds it revealed a desolate scene,

a world of drifts that shifted and changed in architecture with the caprices of the storm that still raged. And in the afternoon, struggling through the snow, came a woman and a little boy. Staggering to the door of the Wilson home she knocked feebly, and the next moment fell prostrate on the floor of the farmhouse. The old man raised her in his arms and tore the veil from her face. Then his face went white as the snow that clung to her garments.

“O God!” he gasped.

“Mary!” It was a scream from the mother who stood in the doorway. She tottered forward, and flung her arms about the woman. “My daughter! God is merciful!” she sobbed.

The old man laid his unconscious burden on a couch and then stepped back, his face drawn and haggard.

“Mother,” he said, and the flint of New England’s hills was in his voice, “she has fainted. Bring her to, and then — and then —”

The mother looked up, and a flash was in her eye. “You shall not send her away!” she cried. “God has given her back to me, and if she leaves this house, I go, too!”

There was a movement from the woman on the couch, her eyelids fluttered, then opened, and she gazed about her. Then she stretched one trembling hand towards the old man, but he set his jaws and folded his arms. The child, which had been standing unheeded close by, stole to his mother’s side,

hesitated, and then in a sweet, clear voice began to sing:

“The storms of life may fiercely blow,
And sorrow in surging tides may flow,
Whatever may come, come joy, come woe,
Still here, here, here, thy refuge forever, forever is here.”

The old man turned towards the door, his face still stern.

“Father!” The word came almost in a whisper from the woman on the couch, and he hesitated. “Hear me a moment, won’t you?” she pleaded, and he faced about.

“Well?” he said, and the mother stole to him, and laid her hand on his arm.

The woman sat up. “Was it sin because I was deceived?” she asked, pathetically. “If I am not a wife the guilt is not mine. I took the marriage vows, but the ceremony was a mockery, a sham. Not for months did I learn of this —”

A step sounded behind her, and a drawling voice interrupted. “My good people, I am deeply grateful for your hospitality. I lost my way in that blinding storm and certainly would have perished had you not taken me in. But now I must thank you and go. I feel —”

The sentence was not finished. The woman had slowly arisen from the couch, and now stood facing him. A startled look leaped to his eyes, and he faltered in his speech.

“Father,” spoke the woman, and her tones were clear and cold. “Fate has sent this man here.”

She pointed towards him. "There stands George Morse — my husband before God!"

The old man stepped forward with a strange sound, a sound that was almost a snarl. But the stranger, after the first wavering, gazed at the woman unmoved.

"Sir," he said, "if this is your daughter I extend my sympathy, as her mind is certainly unbalanced. I never saw her before in my life."

"You lie!"

With a quick movement the woman jerked a locket from her bosom and held it open in her upraised hand. It contained the picture of a man.

"Father, does not this tell you?" she asked.

The old man stared at it a moment; then he turned to the wall and snatched from it the shotgun. The mother uttered a shriek and the man turned to escape, but the gun had leaped to the old man's shoulder and his finger was on the trigger. But the outer door had opened unnoticed and Robert Wayne stood on the threshold. In his hand he clutched a paper. He saw the impending tragedy, saw the glittering eye glancing along the gun-barrel, and sprang forward just in time to thrust the paper beneath the descending hammer, and the cartridge failed to explode.

"Don't!" he said to the Major. Then he turned to the other. "George Morse, or John Ormand, if you like that better, thank your God for that paper. Once it stood between you and a crime; now it has stood between you and death!"

"What paper?" asked Morse, his lips white.

Wayne withdrew it from beneath the hammer, and spread it out. "A marriage license," he said, "issued to George A. Morse and Mary L. Wilson."

"Well, what of it?" The tone was defiant.

"What of it? It means that Mary Lorraine Wilson is your wife!"

A harsh laugh broke from the other's lips. "Then who is this woman?" he asked.

For the first time Wayne turned to look at the woman who stood with the child at her side, and an exclamation of astonishment escaped him. Before him stood the image of Lorraine.

"I am Mary L. Wilson," she said. "And you" — she suddenly caught her breath and stepped closer — "*you are the man who performed the mock marriage!*"

In an instant the old man's fingers were clutching at the preacher's throat, his strength being that of a maniac.

"Traitor! Dog!" he muttered, as his fingers tightened.

Wayne struggled desperately, and finally broke the other's clutch, and then, exerting all of his strength, he pinioned the old man's arms to his sides.

"For the love of God, Major, be calm a moment!" he gasped. "I am not guilty of this charge."

The old man's strength deserted him as suddenly as it had come, and he sank weakly into a chair.

During the struggle Morse had sprung to the door and hurried away, unheeded. Wayne wiped the perspiration from his brow, and then turned to the woman who had denounced him.

"I am the man who pronounced the ceremony," he said, "but I swear that the marriage was legal."

She clutched at his arm with a cry of joy. "What?" she cried. "Say that again!"

"I declare the marriage legal. I was a duly accredited minister and you are a wife in the sight of the law."

"But he told me that it was all a sham — that you were not an ordained minister."

"Yes," he said, "I know all that. And he believed it to be true at the time. He intended that it should be a mockery, but he found out later that it was legal."

The old man stumbled forward. "Bob," he said, weakly. "Bob, we owe you everything, then."

Wayne's face was pale again, but his voice was steady. "You owe forgiveness to your daughter," he said, simply.

"Yes," replied the old man, "I remember your sermon, 'The Rose and the Thorn,' and I wondered how you chanced to be preaching at me. As for Mary —" He turned and held out his arms to her, and with a sob of delight she sprang into his embrace.

"Bob," said the old man again. "I reckon you'll have to explain it all some other time. Joe and

Lorraine are over to Munson's, and mother and I can't understand just now."

Wayne bowed and turned away. Slowly he ascended the stairs and entered his own room. Then he fell on his knees, and a silent prayer was offered up. His head was bowed on his hands, his eyes were closed, and before him appeared the Cross, and the spotless purity of Christ was reflected thereon. He had conquered self with duty and the shadow was gone.

He sat before the fire and tried to get intelligence from the sudden chaos. Mary L. Wilson! And, after all, it was not Mary Lorraine! But how like! The mystery was not yet solved, but his heart was bounding at the thought of Lorraine's freedom. But his past! Was it not such as would leave him dishonored in her eyes? But it was finished now. His journey to the South had been successful and the marriage proofs were now where they belonged. It only remained for him to go.

The afternoon wore away and the early winter twilight deepened as he sat there, brooding. A step sounded on the stairs, and he looked up to see Lorraine standing in the doorway, and through the dusk he saw that she was smiling. She advanced with outstretched hand, and he started to his feet.

"I want to welcome you home — and to thank you," she said, and paused.

He bowed. "It is good of you," he said, "but this family owes me no thanks."

"We are proud of you, Mr. Wayne." Her words sounded strangely formal.

"But you will have nothing but contempt after I tell you all."

She ignored the remark. "And to think that you should be with us all these months and the secret just now be revealed."

He flushed with guilt. "I could not always see my duty clearly, and — sometimes — I closed my eyes to duty. And then the Cross was shadowed."

She looked at him in a puzzled manner. "Mary and I are twins," she said, apparently at random. "Frequently we were mistaken for each other."

"Yes," he said, and the word came almost in a whisper. The entire tangle was becoming clear.

"Father was stern," she continued, slowly. "When he heard that Mary had dishonored him, as he thought, he forbade the mention of her name. You found her picture once, in a book, and thought it was I."

He nodded. "I remember," he said.

"And you saw her in Riverside with the little boy and the blind violinist the night of the rally. When you returned and said you thought you had seen me, I knew that she must be near. And one night she came clear out here and stood out in the road during a storm, watching us through the windows."

"Joe saw her by a lightning flash," he said. "He found her handkerchief."

"And now father has taken her back, and we are all so happy, so happy!"

He sat down, his face gray and haggard. "I am glad I got back when I did," he said. "I drove through from Riverside in order to get here for Christmas. The struggle was over and I had done my duty. I had thought that if I remained silent I might win — that is — well, duty won in the struggle with self. But I feel a deep responsibility for the heartaches of this family."

"You responsible? How?"

"By performing the supposed mock marriage." He paused a moment, and then continued in a tone of sudden resolution: "I must tell the truth. I knew George Morse to be a scoundrel — but he had no reason to suspect that I was a minister. I had not preached for a year when I met him, and I had fallen to his own level. I was dissolute, and the wine-cup was in my hand oftener than the Bible. I was drunk the night he told me he was to be married. He said he had the license all right and wanted me to play preacher. I remembered afterwards how he laughed when he made the proposal, and he ordered a fresh bottle of wine to moisten the joke, he said, though I didn't exactly understand the joke part then. But in my befuddled condition, I said, 'All right,' and asked no questions. He gave me the license and took me somewhere in a carriage, and there I found — her. I performed the marriage and went away,

taking the license with me, and the next day I was sober enough to have it recorded."

The girl was standing with clasped hands, drinking in his words.

"I know you must hate me," he said.

She stepped forward and leaned on the centre-table. "No," she replied. "Don't you see that you saved us? Had George Morse known that you were a minister he would have procured the services of some one else."

He looked up quickly. "Then you do not hold me responsible?" he asked.

"No. But why did you not make this known years ago?"

He arose, and paced the room a moment. "Because," he said, "when I learned that the marriage was supposed to be a sham I was — a convict."

She caught her breath with a cry. "A convict?"

The lines of his face were deepening. "Yes," he replied, "but an innocent one — before God, an innocent one! That was also the work of Morse. He wanted to get rid of me, so he gave me a bank check, and afterwards swore it was a forgery. His money sent me to prison. While there I learned that the marriage was supposed to be fraudulent. I told the truth then, but no one would believe a convict or investigate my story. I was three years in that earthly hell, and then one night I escaped. For days they hunted me with bloodhounds, but they failed. Then, one day, I was passing down the street of a city, when a runaway came dashing

towards me with women in the carriage, screaming. Somehow I stopped the team, but they picked me up unconscious. The ladies had me taken to their home, and when I opened my eyes I found myself in the governor's home. I had saved his wife and daughter. I finally confessed to him that I was an escaped convict, and he took me to his office. I sat there expecting the officers to claim me, but in a few moments he handed me a paper and a roll of bills. I refused the money, but I took the paper. I have it here." He drew it from his pocket. "It is a pardon."

She had walked to the window and was looking out, but he knew that she was listening, and continued:

"Then I again began my search for Morse, but I heard that he had been killed in a railroad wreck. I did not want to go back to the place where I had been convicted, for even a guilty man may carry a pardon. I was alone in the world, and in desperation I turned tramp until the trainmen put me off at Willow Creek water-tank. Then Joe offered me a hope, and that night I saw you in the moonlight and thought you were the one I had married to Morse."

The voice of the old mother was heard calling Lorraine, and without a word she turned and left the room. When they called him to supper he answered that they must excuse him; he did not care to eat. Then the Major ascended the stairs and found him packing his trunk.

"What does this mean, Robert?" he asked.

Wayne was on his knees before the trunk. "It means," he replied, "that I am doing the only thing left to do — getting ready to go away."

"Why, you have just come back!"

"Yes, but I must go now — and not come back."

The old man advanced and laid his hand on the preacher's head.

"Don't say that," he said. "You mustn't leave us, Bob. You've drawn the flint from my soul, and brought me closer to God. I know there isn't much of a future here, but the little church needs you." There was a break in his voice.

"It isn't the money. I have some of my own — down on the Suwanee, and I am free to claim it now. But you don't know about —"

"Yes, I do. We all know. Lorraine told us. You've got the governor's pardon for a crime you did not commit. If you have God's pardon for the mistakes you did make, what more can man or the angels ask?"

The dawn of Christmas found the storm stilled, but the landscape looked unfamiliar with its deep snow covering. Early the chore boy was sent floundering through the drifts, on the back of a farm-horse, to announce a Christmas service at Walnut Grove.

The organ was heard in the parlor, and little Joe made believe that his grandfather was a horse, and, sitting astride the old man's shoulders, used his ears for lines, or else he romped on the floor with

his Uncle Joe, and played with the toys the stalwart young farmer had braved the storm of the night before to bring from Craigville.

Paragraph and Susanna drove up and came stamping in, bringing with them a breath of winter.

“Oh, the snow lies deep to-day along the Wabash,”

sang Paragraph, and then darted forward to shake hands with Mary, whom Susanna was already embracing. Then he turned to Wayne.

“Parson,” he said, “one day last June I called you a *rara avis*, and it was good Latin, too, but now I haven’t enough of that deceased lingo in my cranium to say just what I want to, so I’ll do the American way and shake your hand. Joe told it all to me last night, and I reckon that from now on the moonlight will be a little fairer along the Wabash. But wait! Here’s a letter for you. A fellow stopped into my office last evening and wrote it. We didn’t need any introduction, for I threw him out of the *Sun* office one time. Said for me to hand it to you.”

The preacher broke the seal, and an exclamation of surprise escaped him. The note was brief. It read:

“CRAIGVILLE, IND., December 24.

“TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:—I hereby acknowledge Mary Louise Wilson as my lawful wife. As such she is entitled to share my property. I also declare Robert Wayne innocent of the forgery

charge on which he was convicted. I never expect to cross the path of either of these parties again.

“ (Signed) GEORGE MORSE.”

The little church at the crossroads was crowded, and when Wayne walked to the pulpit he was greeted first by a waving of handkerchiefs, and then by an outburst of hand-clapping, an ovation that caused his eyes to moisten and his lips to quiver as he faced the sturdy, honest congregation.

The service was a simple one. He told them of the birth of the Savior, of how He had been a man among men, living the one perfect life in the midst of the world's temptations. He talked of the scene on Calvary, and in unstudied eloquence told how Christ had suffered crucifixion in order that men might be saved. As he closed with a fervid prayer, the Major started “Jesus, Lover of My Soul,” and, as Wayne looked out over the audience, he saw the old mother's face radiant with God's peace. The last verse was finished, and the preacher had raised his hand in benediction, when a man arose from a rear seat. It was Jim Gordon.

“Wait a minute!” he exclaimed, and then strode up the aisle, while a hush fell on the people. Reaching the front, he turned and faced them.

“I want to say that the Christ who died on the Cross is living in my heart, and I wish to unite with His people under the leadership of this man, Rev. Robert Wayne.” He turned and reached out

his hand to Wayne, and the latter clasped it in a warm grip.

About the church door the people clustered to exchange greetings, and to extend a welcome home to Mary Wilson and to the minister. Timothy Craig was there, his freckled face aglow with happiness. He squeezed Wayne's hand until the joints cracked.

"By jing! Parson, this thing's better'n any puzzle picture I ever looked at. Jake Hausman and Bill Ward couldn't come, but they sent their 'Howdy' to you."

Jap Munson rushed up and slapped him on the back. "I'm in a rush, Parson," he said. "Wife's home threatened with the lockjaw, and the kids have all got new pains for Christmas, but I 'lowed they'd peg along while I rushed over to see you a bit. But I'll have to hurry along, for Hiram Owens and his family are comin' over to eat turkey with us, lockjaw or no lockjaw. An' say! Owens is a politician out of sight! We've agreed to forget about '73, and I'm goin' to fetch him out for road supervisor next time and manage his campaign for him." He shook hands twice, bobbed his red head this way and that, and hurried away, the pop of his blacksnake sounding sharp on the crisp air.

Wayne found himself beside Lorraine. "I have a reckless notion to walk home through the woods," he said, "and am trying to summon courage to ask you to defy the snow and walk with me."

"Surely a Hoosier cannot shrink from the snow

a Southerner seeks," she replied, laughing, and he read his answer in her speech.

There were so many things to talk about, but, somehow, they walked mostly in silence, the sentences they uttered sounding formal and strained. They passed through the woods, circling about the deeper drifts and braving the smaller ones.

"The old sugar-camp," he said, as the cabin came in view. Then they peeped inside and saw the same chunk on which Lorraine had stood to escape the waters of the June storm.

"How different — then and now." It was the girl who spoke, and she stepped inside.

A sudden gust of wind sifted the snow through the dilapidated roof and sprinkled her head.

"A crown of purity on the brow of an angel who once held a sceptre of roses," he said.

She looked up quickly, and a warm glow stole to her cheeks. He stepped to her side.

"It was a sudden speech, but I'll finish it now. Can't you see that I love you, Lorraine, that all the way here I've been trying to tell you?"

She turned slowly towards him. The radiance of a great love was in her eyes, and a smile was on her lips. The next moment she was in his arms and was laughing and crying her happiness. They went out of the hut hand in hand and walked a moment in silence.

"Robert," she said, and the name was music to his ears, "why did you not tell me long ago that that marriage was legal?"

He slipped his arm about her and looked into her eyes. "Because," he said, "I thought it was you — and I could not give you up."

Across the fields of snow a farm bell sounded.

"The chimes of Christmas," she said, "proclaiming Christ's message, 'On earth peace, toward men good-will.'"

THE END.

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